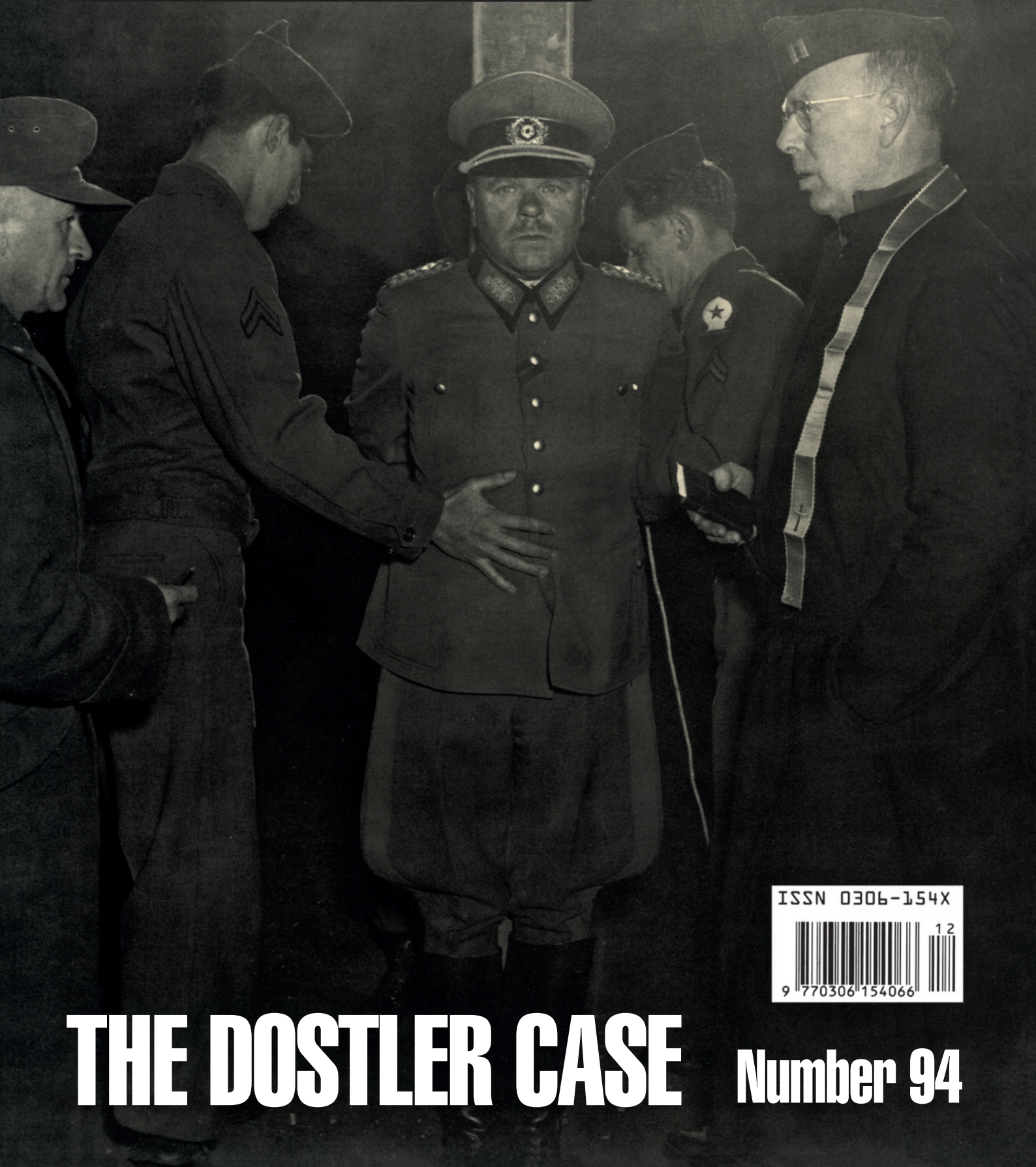


AFTER THE BATTLE



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THE DOSTLER CASE

Number 94

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Edited by Winston G. Ramsey

European Editor: Karel Margry

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CONTENTS

THE DOSTLER CASE	1
PACIFIC	
Nauru	20
READERS' INVESTIGATION	
The Second World War's Best Kept Secret Revealed	31
WRECK RECOVERY	
Belgian Spitfire Pilot Honoured	34
IT HAPPENED HERE	
The Desert Rats at Ghent	40
UNITED KINGDOM	
Mystery Crash in London's East End	50

Front Cover: The execution of the first German general to be found guilty of war crimes took place at the US Peninsular Base Section Garrison Stockade No. 1 at Aversa, Italy. (USNA)

Centre Pages: Relics of the war on Nauru — a unique Pacific island contested by Germany, Japan, Italy and Australia. (David Green)

Back Cover: General Anton Dostler now lies in the Deutscher Soldatenfriedhof at Pomezia, south of Rome. (Karel Margry)

Acknowledgements: Karel Margry would like to thank David Hale, Corry van der Sluys and Hans Houterman, the latter also for help with the Ghent story. Jean-Paul Marchal is indebted to Major A. H. Crickmay, Gordon Johnson, Henri Morgan (brother of Ronnie) and Alexis Janssens for their personal accounts, and extends his thanks to Marc Verschueren and Norbert Masson for their help with comparison photography.

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In the months leading up to the invasion of France in June 1944, Italy was the only area on the Continent of Europe where the Western Allies were engaged in continuous land battles with German forces.

When Germany occupied Italy in September 1943 following the Allied invasion of Sicily, the landings in southern Italy and subsequent downfall of Mussolini (see *After the Battle* No. 77), it hastened to reinforce its troops already fighting south of Rome. At the same time, major formations of German troops were stationed in northern Italy and along the Adriatic and Ligurian coastlines to guard against Allied raids and further landings.

Although the Allies were not planning any major incursions in the north, several Allied agencies did organise and undertake small-scale operations behind enemy lines for the purpose of reconnaissance and sabotage; to establish observation posts, and carry out missions in support of Italian partisans.

It was in the aftermath of one such operation in the early spring of 1944 that the Wehrmacht became involved in a little-known incident involving the killing of a group of 15 American soldiers who had been sent out to blow up an important railway tunnel, but had been taken prisoner-of-war before being able to accomplish their mission. Their deaths were deemed a war crime by the Allies and, as a result, within months of the end of hostilities in Italy, the German general involved, General der Infanterie Anton Dostler, was arraigned before an American military tribunal. He was found guilty and paid for it with his life. Although few people remember it today, at the time the Dostler case was highly publicised, especially in the United States, and was generally regarded as something of a cause célèbre, both because it was the first war crime trial involving a German general and because of the pattern it was supposed to set for later trials.



Above: On Saturday morning, December 1, 1945, German General Anton Dostler is being tied to a post prior to being shot as a war criminal by an American Army firing squad at a US military prison camp at Aversa, Italy. **Opposite top:** Seven weeks earlier, at his trial that was held in Rome on October 8-12, Dostler had been found guilty of having ordered the summary execution of 15 American soldiers captured in northern Italy in March 1944. The Dostler case was important in that it was the first trial of a German general officer and, with Dostler basing his defence on a plea of superior orders, one that was certain to create precedents for all future war crime trials, including the major one at Nuremberg. Dostler was also the first German general to be executed after the Second World War, and the first ever by an American firing squad. (USNA) **Right:** The trial was held in the Rome Palace of Justice, the particular courtroom today being known as the Aula per la Difesa della Patria.



THE DOSTLER CASE





The 15 Americans executed at Dostler's order belonged to a special sabotage unit of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), named Detachment C, 2677th Headquarters Company (Provisional). Made up entirely of Italo-Americans, it carried out missions behind enemy lines on the Italian mainland, operating

from bases on the island of Corsica. In February 1944, a plan was made to cut the Genoa-La Spezia railway line, a vital supply line for the Germans, by blowing up the tunnel between Stazione di Framura (above left) and Bonassola (above right). Thus, Operation 'Ginny' was born.

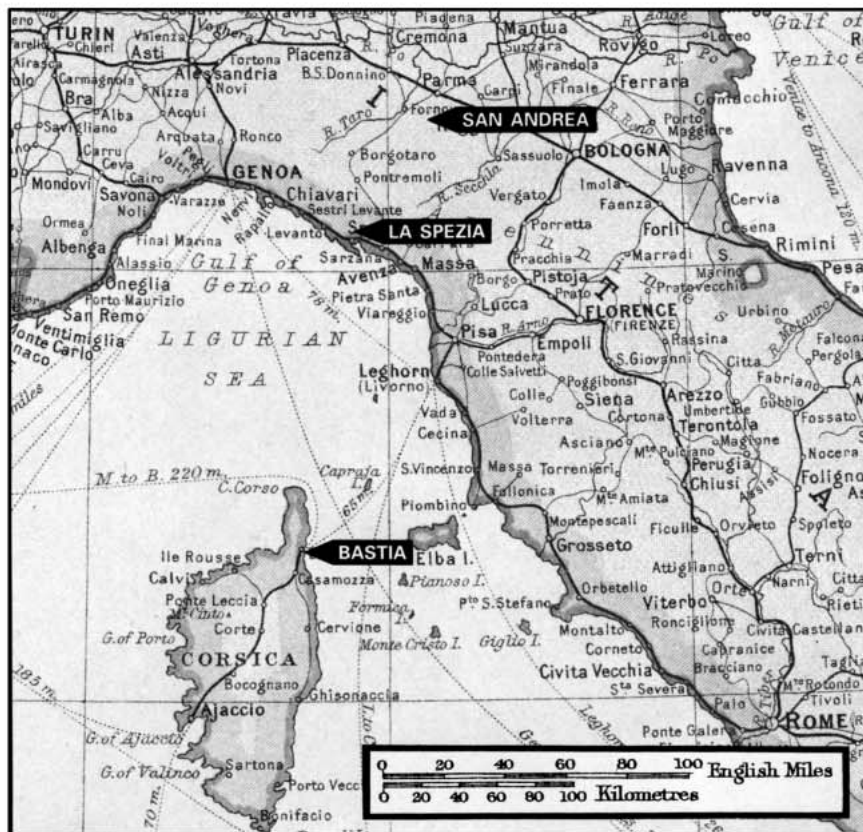
In April 1943, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) had activated a special unit for sabotage and other special operations behind enemy lines in Italy. Named Detachment C (Unit A, First Contingent), 2677th Headquarters Company, OSS (Provisional), it consisted exclusively of Americans with an Italian background. Most of them could actually speak Italian, although not all were fluent. Commanded by Colonel Edward J. Glavin, by March 1944 the unit was stationed at Ile Rousse on the island of Corsica, which had been liberated in October 1943 and lay only 35 miles from the Italian mainland. For sea transportation, the unit depended on PT boats of the 15th Motor Torpedo Boat Squadron of the US Navy based at Bastia harbour.

In March 1944, the front in Italy was at Cassino with a further front at the Anzio beach-head. One of the main German supply lines to these places was the railway line which ran along the western coast of Italy from Genoa south through La Spezia to Livorno. Under Operation 'Strangle', the Allied air forces had been assigned to cut all German lines of communication but, because of the mountains close to the shore and the many tunnels on the railway, they had not succeeded in cutting the Genoa-Livorno line. The G-3, Special Operations, at Allied Forces Headquarters at Algiers then suggested that the best way to cut the line was to demolish one of the tunnels by means of a sabotage party landed from the sea. Some 15 miles north-west of La Spezia, the line ran

through a tunnel between a small station named Stazione di Framura and the fishing village of Bonassola, and this was suggested as a suitable target. The plan was approved by all concerned, and assigned to the 2677th Headquarters Company.

The mission, code-named 'Ginny', was prepared, mounted and directed by the unit's operations officer, 1st Lieutenant Albert R. Materazzi. The aim was to destroy the northern tunnel entrance, located some 500 yards south-east of Stazione di Framura. The operation would start out from Bastia. The plan was that two PT boats of the 15th MTB Squadron land a party of 15 men with demolition equipment near the tunnel under cover of darkness. The party was to consist of a demolition team of nine men commanded by 1st Lieutenant Vincent Russo, and a covering team of six riflemen commanded by 1st Lieutenant Paul J. Traficante. Landing from three rubber boats, they were to proceed to the target by following a natural ravine, neutralize the signal house and, after an on the spot reconnaissance, demolish the target by blowing both tunnel entrances of the double-track line and a road bed fill, using 375lbs of explosives. The exact method — where to place the charges, whether to dig them in or not, whether the firing device was to be tripped by a train or exploded by time fuse — were all left to Lieutenant Russo's discretion. After blowing up the tunnel, the men were to return to the rubber boats and be picked up by the waiting PTs. Radio contact between the party ashore and the boats at sea was to be via walkie-talkie.

The operation was carefully timed complete with contingency plans. The party was to be launched at 2300, and be at the target ready to proceed at 0030. If by 0200 the officer commanding (Russo) had decided he could not complete the job and be back on board by 0330, he would so notify the boat party by radio and return some of the men with the rubber boats. Those remaining on shore would then work to have the target prepared for demolition by 2300 the following night. At this time, the party would be back on the beach, with two men left behind to set off the charges. When contact with the PT boats had been established, the delays would be set off and rubber boats launched to pick the men up. Should the PTs for some reason be unable to return the following night, this same procedure would be followed for four more nights. If no contact had been made by then, the shore party was to



Headquarters of the 2677th Company was at Bastia, the north-east Corsican seaport. Sabotage units of the OSS were organised in so-called 'Operational Groups' (OGs in short), subdivided in sections of about 15 men, but in practice most OSS operations involved fewer troops. The 'Ginny' mission was one of the first to require an entire OG section. For transport to the Italian mainland, the 2677th made use of the PT boats of the 15th Motor Torpedo Boat Squadron, which was also based at Bastia. The 15th MTB Squadron had arrived in the Mediterranean in April 1943. Equipped with Higgins-type PT boats (the other standard type used by the US Navy was the Elco) and commanded by Lieutenant Commander Stanley M. Barnes, the unit initially operated from Bône on the eastern Algerian coast, moving to Corsica in October. Under overall command of British Coastal Forces, and carrying out many successful joint operations with British MTBs and MGBs, the PTs had the advantage of being equipped with radar, which enabled them to locate enemy ships more easily. For that reason, they usually operated in a scouting rôle ahead of the British boats. The British senior naval officer on Corsica accepted and encouraged clandestine maritime operations, and had established a procedure for determining sea transport priorities between the various agencies (SIS, SOE, OSS) operating from the island. These pictures of two of 15th MTB Squadron's boats — PT 202 (*top*) and PT 211 (*right*) — were taken in Bastia old port on February 19, 1944 — eight days before Operation 'Ginny's' aborted first attempt and a month before the second. (USNA)

blow the tunnel and proceed inland to a safe house about 40 miles away, from where Bastia would be informed and plans laid on to pick them up. Although of the partisan type, and staged about 300 miles behind the front lines at Cassino and Anzio, this was to be a regular military operation. All men were to be properly dressed in US Army field uniforms. They would not carry civilian clothes.

The operation was first attempted on the night of February 27/28, but due to difficulty in finding the landing pinpoint, the shore party was launched 1½ hours behind schedule. They rowed ashore but, having landed, failed to find the target or even establish with certainty where they were. This made even the contingency plan impossible and the men had to be called back. The party was picked up by the PT boats and returned to Corsica without incident.

For the second attempt, Lieutenant Burkes of OSS Intelligence at Naples prepared a further, and more complete, target study based on profiles of the railway and intelligence gathered from engineers of the Italian Railways maintenance section. Captain James W. Bickford of the 52nd Fighter Group flew a photographic reconnaissance of the area on March 10. On the basis of this additional information, it was decided to increase the amount of demolition from 375 lbs to 650lbs and concentrate on the tunnel entrances. Lieutenant Russo conducted various experiments in methods of carrying this larger quantity, and several rehearsals were held near Ile Rousse with a complete 'dry-run' on the night of March 20/21. The timings and emergency plans were the same as in the previous attempt.

Our comparison was taken for us by Corry van der Sluys from the Netherlands who was kind enough to include it in her holiday trip to Corsica. Since 1944, the northern quay of the Vieux Port has been widened by several yards.



At this time, German forces in Italy were under the Oberbefehlshaber Südwest, Generalfeldmarschall Albert Kesselring. Northern Italy was held by Armeegruppe von Zangen, commanded by General der Infanterie Gustav von Zangen. The Ligurian coast was defended by the LXXV. Armeekorps commanded by General der Infanterie Anton

Dostler, with headquarters at San Andrea near Parma. The stretch of coastline on either side of La Spezia was guarded by Festungs-Brigade 135 under Oberst Kurt Almers, whose headquarters was at Carrazzo near La Spezia. In the line he had three fortress battalions: from north to south, Festungs-Bataillon 207, 906 and 905.





Operation 'Ginny' was planned and organised by 1st Lieutenant Albert R. Materazzi, the operations officer of the 2677th Headquarters Company. Although he did not land with the OG on the night of March 22/23, he went with them on the voyage, directing the operation from aboard the No. 1 boat, PT 214. He also went on the two attempts, both unsuccessful, to pick up the OG during the following nights. Like many of the protagonists in the story of the 'Ginny' mission, he was later to appear as a witness in the Dostler trial, where this picture was taken. (USNA)

On the night of March 22/23, the OSS party embarked in US Navy gun boats PT 214 (Lieutenant R.T. Boebel, USNR) and PT 210 (Lieutenant Harold Nugent, USNR) for the second attempt. The boats left Bastia at 1755, the OSS men being held below decks during the voyage, and made landfall west of Stazione di Framura at 2245. High on a hill above it one bright light was seen, and the lights at Framura Station were on. About 300 yards out, the sabotage team changed to the three rubber boats and headed for shore. Radio contact was indistinct, but at 2315 Lieutenant Russo reported that he had reached shore and was looking for a place to land.

The first landing point was impossible to negotiate and therefore the boats shifted their course one mile west, until they got to a narrow rocky beach where they managed to land. Lieutenant Russo took three men to make a reconnaissance, while the others were left to guard the boats and equipment. Making his way up the steep hill, he discovered that they had landed near a place locally known as Carpineggio, which lay about halfway between the village of Bonassola and Stazione di Framura, and that the target was still about a mile and a half further west. Their initial landing point had thus been nearly 2½ miles too far to the east. Meanwhile, the radio man was trying to contact the PT boats but, although he tried both walkie-talkies, he could not raise anyone.

Out at sea, the PTs had in fact been forced to leave. At 2345, they had sighted a convoy



The sabotage team rowed ashore in three rubber boats and landed at this craggy bay, some 500 feet below the tiny locality of Carpineggio. In the darkness, they had missed their designated pinpoint, Stazione di Framura, by some three kilometres, having landed about a kilometre west of the other end of the tunnel at Bonassola.

headed north. It comprised two German torpedo boats returning from a mine-laying mission near Bastia. PT 210 took diversionary action and was fired upon by the lead German boat. PT 214 idled south on one engine, but in doing so lost radio contact with shore. Laying off two miles south of the pinpoint, it saw a green flare coming up from the coast which sharply outlined the boat. Seaward, an answering red and white flare was seen. The boat moved further south, but was again challenged by a green flare. Contacting

PT 210, both boats rendezvoused five miles out at sea at 0200. By then, their radar showed numerous targets between them and shore. By 0300, the area was clear again and they decided to go in. However, just then, PT 210 reported its main steering mechanism gone. By the time it was repaired, it was 0415 and too late to pick up the party before daylight. After consultation with Lieutenant Materazzi, on board PT 214, Lieutenant Boebel decide to retire, and try again next night.

MEMBERS OF 'GINNY' MISSION (MARCH 22/23) EXECUTED ON MARCH 26, 1944

Demolition party

1st Lieutenant Vincent Russo, 01109637
Sergeant Alfred L. DeFlumeri, 31252071
Tech/5 Liberty J. Tremonte, 31329179
Tech/5 Joseph M. Farrell, 31329187
Tech/5 Salvatore DiSclafani, 32297264
Tech/5 Angelo Sirico, 32543008
Tech/5 John J. Leone, 32577443
Tech/5 Thomas N. Savino, 32540701
Tech/5 Joseph A. Libardi, 31212732

Montclair, New Jersey
Natick, Massachusetts
Westport, Connecticut
Southport, Connecticut
Brooklyn, New York
Brooklyn, New York
Brooklyn, New York
Poughkeepsie, New York
Brooklyn, New York
West Stockbridge, Massachusetts

Security party

1st Lieutenant Paul J. Traficante, 01308399
Tech/Sergeant Livio Viecei, 33037797
Sergeant Dominick C. Mauro, 32650582
Tech/5 Joseph Noia, 32536119
Tech/5 Rosario F. Squatrito, 32542038
Tech/5 Santoro Calcara, 36131251

New York, New York
Manor, Pennsylvania
New York, New York
New York, New York
Staten Island, New York
Detroit, Michigan



By the time Russo returned from his recce, several hours had passed. When told that radio contact with the boats was lost and that they had probably gone, Russo decided for the contingency plan. He could not send back part of his men to the PTs, as had been the plan, so they would all remain in hiding for the rest of the night and the next day, and attempt to re-establish radio contact the following night. He would not blow the tunnel until contact had been made.

Throughout the day of Thursday, March 23, the 15 men remained in hiding. The dinghies with the explosives and demolition equipment were drawn up on the beach about 18 metres from the shoreline, up the rocky crevices and under the trees, and camouflaged. The whole party moved inland up in the steep hills about 400 metres. They found an lone empty stable which they occupied. The group had not brought food for so many men, and they soon became hungry.

About 0900 that morning, Franco Lagaxo, a peasant living on the crest of the hill overlooking the sea, saw two armed men in uniform approaching the little cottage where he lived with his mother. The pair identified themselves as Americans and, drying their wet clothes at the farmhouse fireplace, asked the Italian whether he could bring them to the 'little house' of the railway. Not quite sure what the Americans meant, Lagaxo took them to the nearby locality of Paggio, but this was not what the strangers were looking for. Releasing him, the Americans

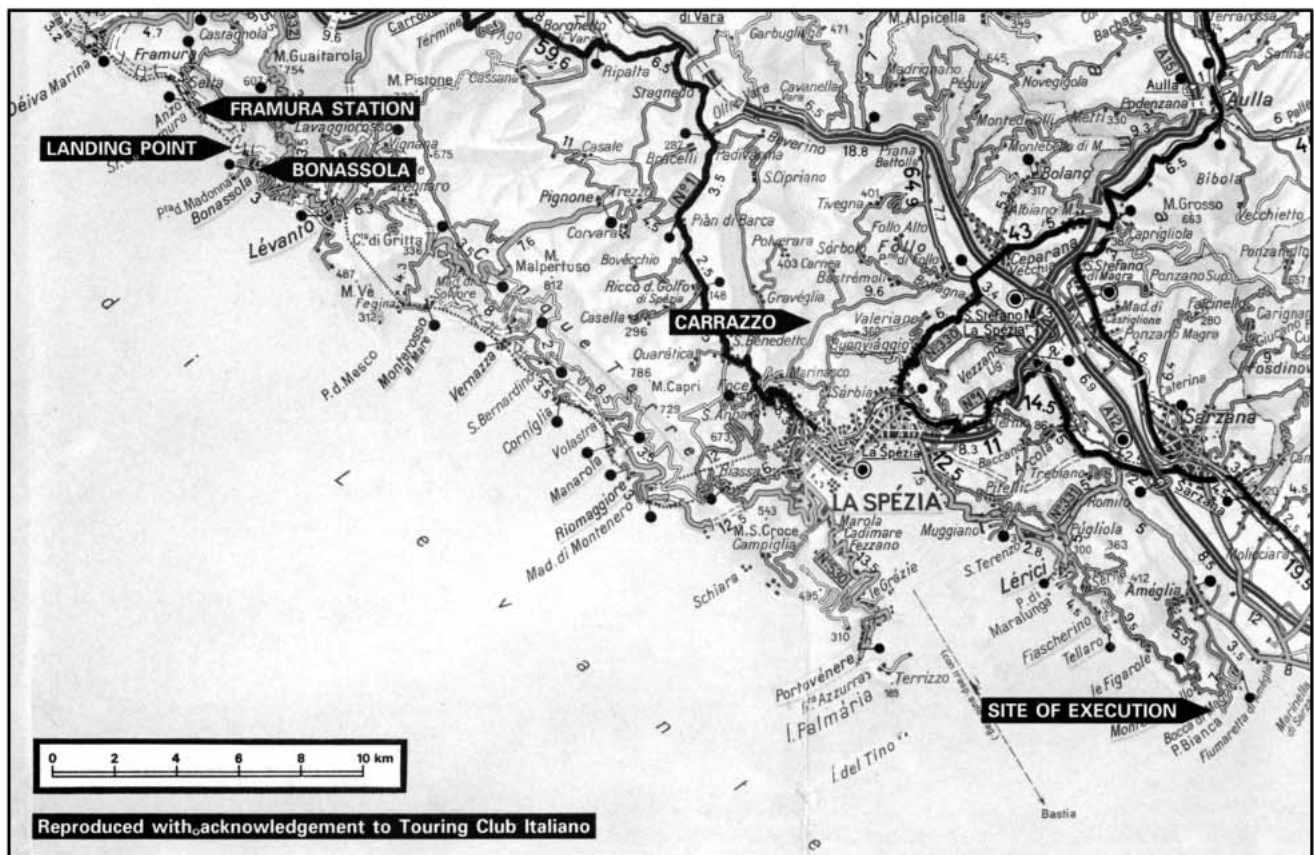
Unable to reach the tunnel and blow it in the remaining hours of darkness, and finding radio contact with the PT boats offshore broken, the team commander, Lieutenant Vincent Russo, had no other option but to hole up with his men for 24 hours and try to complete the mission the following night. Climbing the steep hill from the beach, they found an empty stable where they could hide. Right: Today, the site of the stable is occupied by a modern villa guarded by dogs and surrounded by a fence which precluded the taking of any close-in pictures.

Even with a calm sea and during daytime, it is difficult to clamber over the boulders and stones, and the OSS operatives must have had quite a job hauling their boats and demolition equipment over the rocks and up into the steep gully on that cold, dark March night.

then asked Lagaxo to buy them fish, eggs and wine, which they said they would collect at his house later. This Lagaxo did, and at noon the two Americans returned, now with a third man. They ate some 'polenta' at the house, then left with the food, having agreed with Lagaxo that at 1500 he would come to get them near a little stable some 200 yards from his house for another attempt to find the 'little house'. This time, Lagaxo brought them to the right place, about an hour's hike from his house. 'This is where we were supposed to land', the Americans told him, and let him go. Later that day, towards dusk, Lagaxo noted the same men in the woods near his house. Thus, the OSS party spent their first day in hiding.

On the second night, March 23/24, PT 214, now accompanied by PT 204 (Lieutenant William F. Toohey, USNR) and PT 207 (Lieutenant G.H. Peresich, USNR), left Bastia to pick up the party, taking three oarsmen, a dinghy and two canvas boats in case the shore party's own boats had become unserviceable. PT 207 soon developed engine trouble and had to return. At 2145, ten miles off landfall, the other boats' radar picked up targets which appeared to patrol the pick-up area. At 0045, the boats attempted to get within radio range of the beach, but three miles out, the radar showed three targets right off the pinpoint, and at 0115 a decision was made to abandon the attempt.





On the morning of Friday, March 24, a fishing boat returning to the nearby fishing village of Bonassola around 0800 reported to the local Fascist shore police that it had sighted rubber boats along the rocks near the shoreline. A Fascist militiaman, Vittorio Bertoni, and a few fishermen went to have a look, and soon found the three boats and two cases of explosives. Since whoever had landed there was obvious still in the area, a systematic search of the whole hillside was begun. Five Fascist militiamen — Bertoni, Giobatta Bianchi (the local Fascist political secretary), Giovanni Ferri, Vincenzo Pertini and Luigi Perrone — joined with a German patrol of seven men led by a Feldwebel to comb the area.

Franco Lagaxo had seen Bertoni discover the boats and, on his own initiative, went to warn the two Americans near his house. Shortly after, seeing the German patrol coming up the mule trail from Carpineggio, he hastened down to the little stable to warn the Americans; for the first time, he saw that they were a numerous group.

His warnings came too late. About 1015, Bertoni and Ferri discovered the two Americans near Lagaxo's house, capturing them by surprise and without opposition. Although the GIs claimed they were alone, Bertoni knew from the number of boats that the enemy party must be larger, and taking a whistle which he had found in one of the boats, blew it. At this, the other Americans, hiding further down, opened up with rifle fire. However, the German patrol and the

On the second night, the men ashore could still not establish W/T contact with the pick-up boats (owing to enemy sea patrols, the PTs failed to get close to the shore) and thus had to face another day in hiding. However, that morning (March 24), they were captured by a search party of Fascist militia and some German soldiers, after a fisherman had spotted their rubber boats on the beach. Surrendering after a short skirmish, they were marched away to Bonassola.

other Italians were nearby and, in a brief fight using hand-grenades and small arms, surrounded the Americans. Lieutenant Russo was slightly wounded. Seeing themselves outnumbered, the OSS men surrendered.

Disarmed, the 15 prisoners were temporarily placed in the storehouse of Lagaxo's farm. While two Germans and two Italians guarded them, the rest of the patrol went back to make sure that there were no other enemy soldiers hiding out. Satisfied that this was so, the German sergeant began questioning the prisoners. All he got out was that they were American soldiers belonging to the US Fifth Army. During the interrogation Giobatta Bianchi was surprised when one of the American officers suddenly addressed him in perfect Genoese dialect saying he would like a dish of spaghetti.

'Are you Italian?', Bianchi asked.
'I am born of Genoese parents', the American said, and gave the Italian his name: Vincent Russo.

About noon, the captured men were brought to Bonassola where they were locked up in the Bianchi's book-keeping office which served as local Fascist headquarters. Here they were again questioned by the local prefect, Commissario Guglielmini, who was able to extract from Russo and Traficante — who must have been tired, hungry and disillusioned by their capture — vital details of their mission: that they had come to blow the railway between Framura and Bonassola, that they had sailed from Corsica on a PT boat and had landed by rubber boats on the night of March 22/23. In his report Guglielmini wrote: 'I got the impression that they had no desire to complete the mission on which they had been sent and that they were content to have been captured. When I asked Lieutenant Vincent Russo if he, the son of an Italian, did not feel ashamed to carry arms against his fatherland, he lowered his head, became red, and did not answer but gave the impression that my words struck home.'





Eighteen months later, at the Dostler trial, Giobatta Bianchi, former Fascist political secretary at Bonassola, describes how he and his comrades found and captured the American saboteurs. (USNA)

Meanwhile, on Corsica, the OSS wondered what had happened to their men. On the afternoon of March 24, the 52nd Fighter Group had flown a photo recon of the Framura area. The photos showed no damage to the Framura tunnel, nor any signs of a dinghy, men, or a light signal.

About 1430, a Wehrmacht truck arrived at Bonassola and took the prisoners to the headquarters of Festungs-Brigade 135 (Oberst Almers) which was located in a castle at the village of Carrazzo, on a hillside behind La Spezia, a road voyage of about 30 miles. They were confined in the HQ staff building, the enlisted men being divided among three rooms in the cellar, and the two officers placed together in one room. Later, the two were kept separate. One of Almers' staff officers, Oberleutnant Wolfgang Koerbitz, ordered that water, bread and straw be provided for them.

Initially locked up in the cellars of the headquarters building, the prisoners were later put in a barn on the grounds of the mansion.



From Bonassola, the captured OSS men were brought to the headquarters of Oberst Kurt Almers, the commander of Festungs-Brigade 135, which was at the village of Carrazzo in the hills above La Spezia.

As brigade Ic (intelligence officer), it was Oberleutnant Koerbitz's task to interrogate the prisoners. However, being only the acting Ic (he was actually Almers' personnel officer), he had little experience in this kind of work and therefore called upon a Kriegsmarine officer, Korvettenkapitän Friedrich Klaps, to help him. Klaps was the chief naval intelligence officer at La Spezia, and had just arrived at Almers' headquarters with orders from his superior to question the captured Americans on naval matters: the Americans had come from Corsica and could probably provide information on the enemy naval bases there. Klaps agreed to take over the interrogation from Koerbitz, but found it impossible due to his poor English. He therefore called for his assistant, Kapitänleutnant George Sessler, who spoke excellent English. He would do the interrogations for both army and navy. Sessler began at 1800 and continued throughout the night up until about 0500 on the 25th. The talks took place in a room in the staff building, to which the Americans were brought one by one. Koerbitz and Klaps were only present at the start, for both had other work to do. Apart from Sessler, there was only his aide, Feldwebel Neubauer, who took notes in German of the data given by Sessler.

Sessler first spoke with Lieutenant Traficante. The latter gave only his name, rank, serial number and home address. So did the enlisted men questioned next. The fourth

man was Lieutenant Russo. At first, he too gave Sessler only his name, rank and army number. Then Sessler played an old trick. He told Russo that Traficante had already made a full statement on the mission and, making an educated guess, said: 'I know that you left from Bastia . . . At what time did you leave?' Duped by this, Russo proceeded to disclose the whole story of the mission: that they had started from Bastia with two officers and 13 men, that they had landed from two PT boats two nights earlier, and that they had orders to blow the railway tunnel near Bonassola.

After Russo, Sessler tried the same bluff on the two enlisted men he had questioned earlier, but they did not fall for it. At 0500 (March 25), he closed the interrogation. Pleased with his success so far, he wrote a report, then at 0800 returned to La Spezia for some sleep.



The man assigned to interrogate the captured GIs was a Kriegsmarine officer, Kapitänleutnant George Sessler. In two long nightly sessions, he managed to extract most tactical details of the 'Ginny' mission from the American prisoners. (USNA)

However, those on duty at Almers' headquarters were dismayed when, on the morning of March 25, a teletype order arrived from the commander of the LXXV. Armeekorps, General Dostler, that the captured Americans were to be shot. Dostler's headquarters was located at San Andrea south of Parma, some 100 kilometres distant from La Spezia.

In mid-afternoon of the 24th, the brigade had reported the capture of the 'Italian-speaking American commando troops' to the LXXV. Armeekorps headquarters, which was located at San Andrea (12 kilometres south-west of Parma and some 100 kilometres from La Spezia). At about 2200, a cable was received from Corps asking whether the interrogation had established an intention on the part of the Allied forces in Corsica of conducting a larger landing operation from there. A report was sent back that this was not the case.

Meanwhile, at corps headquarters, General Dostler faced a difficult dilemma. On October 18, 1942, as a direct result of the Dieppe operation (see *After the Battle* No. 5), Hitler had issued a Führerbefehl (Führer's order) which said that all enemy troops encountered during so-called commando operations, or acting as agents or saboteurs, were to be exterminated to the last man, irrespective of whether they were in uniform or not, or armed or unarmed. If captured alive, they were to be immediately handed over to the Sicherheitsdienst (Security Service). It was formally forbidden to keep them, or send them to a PoW camp. Any commander or officer failing to carry out this order would be summoned before a war tribunal. (This particular Führerbefehl was also known as the 'Kommandobefehl'.)

As soon as he learned of the capture of the American raiders, Dostler discussed with his chief-of-staff, Oberst Horst Kraehe, and other staff officers whether these prisoners fell under the Führerbefehl. They had a file copy of the order brought to them and, studying its text carefully, came to the conclusion that they did. Dostler decided to give out the order accordingly.

At about 0900 on the morning of Saturday, March 25, a cable arrived from Corps addressed to Oberst Almers. It read: 'The captured Americans are to be shot immediately. Signed, Dostler'.

The teletype order created some furore at the brigade headquarters. Almers told Klaps he did not think 'immediately' meant within the next half hour and proposed to take the matter up with Corps again. He did however give orders to Oberleutnant Koerbitz to make the necessary arrangements for the execution. At lunchtime, Koerbitz phoned Oberleutnant Rudolph Bolze, commander of the 1. Kompanie of Festungs-Bataillon 905, which was on the coast holding the sector to the south-east of La Spezia, and gave instructions that a grave was to be dug near the company CP for the burial of 15 men.

However, Koerbitz was decidedly unhappy about the Führerbefehl execution order. When he told the two Kriegsmarine officers, Klaps and Sessler (who had

Korvettenkapitän Friedrich Klaps (here seen at the trial, on right) was the chief naval intelligence officer at La Spezia. It was he who had assigned his assistant Sessler to do the interrogations. Thinking the execution order premature, if not a grave mistake, Klaps, in conjunction with one of Almers' staff officers, Oberleutnant Wolfgang Koerbitz, tried desperately, by doggedly telephoning the LXXV. Armeekorps, to get the order rescinded, or at least postponed. Although he managed to talk Dostler into initially withdrawing the order, he could not save the Americans. (USNA)



returned to Almers' HQ at 1030), about it, both expressed similar doubts. Sessler reacted that, in his opinion, these 15 prisoners certainly did not fall under this Befehl and that he was going to continue his interrogations. Koerbitz asked Klaps, who as a naval intelligence chief could take a more independent stand, to call Corps HQ and inform them of his opinion.

Meanwhile, at about 1100, Oberst Almers phoned LXXV. Armeekorps to talk with Dostler. The corps commander had meditated further about the matter and told Almers to hold the order for the execution while he examined the matter anew. Meanwhile, he was not to carry out the execution. (In another version of this telephone conversation, Dostler did not withdraw the execution order but reprimanded Almers for not already having carried it out.) Again consulting his chief-of-staff and his Ic, Dostler decided to put the matter before the next higher headquarters, Armeegruppe von Zangen. A copy of Almers' report went with the cable.

Dostler had to wait a few hours, for Armeegruppe von Zangen in turn asked OB

Südwest for a decision. Late in the afternoon, the answer reached Dostler from von Zangen's HQ that the American saboteurs were to be shot. To Dostler, that settled the matter. Shortly after, his chief-of-staff, Oberst Kraehe, phoned Almers to pass on the order, telling him that he, Almers, was expected to report that the execution had been carried out by 0700 next morning. Seeing no way to further delay things, at 1530 Almers gave verbal orders for the carrying out of the execution to Hauptmann Rehfeld, commander of Festungs-Bataillon 906, and Leutnant Seidenstucker, commander of the 1. Kompanie of the 906th. They were instructed to pick up the prisoners at 0500 next morning. Later that afternoon, a telegram arrived from Corps confirming Dostler's orders to Almers.

However, Korvettenkapitän Klaps and Oberleutnant Koerbitz were determined to make one last attempt to save the Americans. About 1600, Klaps telephoned the LXXV. Armeekorps HQ, asking for the Ic. The latter was not in, so he spoke to the duty officer, but he had the impression that his message did not get across. He phoned again



several times, asking for various officers, but since none of them was there, in the end he requested to speak to General Dostler himself. It was now about 1930. Introducing himself as the naval Ic, he turned to speaking in code language lest the phone be tapped:

'It is about the 15 guests which arrived', he said. 'In my opinion they are not as bad men as we thought at first, but harmless people. I beg for a delay of the order of execution.'

Dostler asked why, and Klaps explained that he wanted to interrogate further to get more technical details and to find out whether there was any connection to Italian civilians or partisans. Dostler asked how long that would take, and Klaps said it could take anything between five minutes and a week. Thereupon Dostler said he had until 0700 next morning. Realising that this meant the Americans would still be shot, Klaps argued that he could not say everything over the phone. At that, Dostler advised him to send a telegram explaining things.

Meanwhile, at 1400, Sessler had resumed the interrogation of the Americans. In the morning, the 13 enlisted men had been transferred to a large barn-like building, about 200 metres away from the staff building but on the same grounds, and Sessler did his questioning there. None of the men disclosed any details of the mission. Sessler was taken aback when prisoner No. 8 recognized him as a man to whom he had brought ice on Piers 84 and 86 of New York harbour in 1936-37 (Sessler had been an officer on a Hamburg-American Line steamer in pre-war days). In the more personal conversation that followed, Sessler learned that the prisoners had discovered from their guards that they would be shot as saboteurs. He assured the prisoner that he and his superior were doing everything they could to have the group evacuated as PoWs. By 2000, he had questioned all 15 men, and he stopped for a few hours.

During his pause, Sessler met with Klaps and Koerbitz. Klaps told the other two of the phone call he had just had with General Dostler. All three men were convinced that the execution order was premature, so, while Sessler had a rest, Klaps and Koerbitz sat down to write the telegram which Dostler had said Klaps could send. It asked for a delay of the execution order for reason that the captured Americans were not a sabotage group or commando raid as understood by the Führerbefehl, but a proper military mission. It further pointed out the risk of possible reprisals against German soldiers and the need to continue the interrogations. The telegram was sent to Corps about 2100. At Koerbitz's suggestion, Klaps also sent a copy to OB Südwest, Kesselring's headquarters. This done, they sent a second telegram to Corps giving the results of the technical interrogation.

Meanwhile, at 2230, Sessler had gone back to his interrogations for a final attempt to glean information from the prisoners. During his absence, the two officers, Russo and Traficante, had also been transferred from the castle to the stables and, by mistake, been placed together again. Thus, Russo had learned that he had been bluffed into talking. Now aware of their probable fate, the men this time refused to talk at all. Calling No. 8 back in, Sessler told him frankly that everything had been tried but that there was no chance now for a change. They had a long talk of family affairs. As he was led away, the American managed to steal Sessler's pistol from the latter's belt holster which was hanging from the door knob. (Sessler later claimed that he had himself proposed this to the prisoner, out of personal sympathy, allowing him to steal the weapon as a means of personal escape. A tall story indeed, but since he did not report the theft of the gun, it may be true.) By the time Sessler finished this last talk, it was 0300 on Sunday, March 26.



The man ordered to select a spot for the execution of the American prisoners, and take care of their subsequent burial, was Oberleutnant Rudolph Bolze, commander of the 1. Kompanie of Festungs-Bataillon 905. (USNA)

Meanwhile, Klaps worked in his office until midnight, then went home, fully expecting that the execution order would be withdrawn. To make sure, he called Koerbitz at Brigade, but the Lieutenant was not in anymore, and the officer on duty did not know anything either.

Feeling a growing uneasiness, Klaps then tried to phone Corps. He had difficulty get-

ting through, for the connection was bad and the lines were often busy. He managed to make several calls and spoke to several officers — the duty officer, the Ic, the chief-of-staff, the Ia (operations officer) — asking them whether the general had seen his two telegrams. Nobody knew exactly, until one of them said he had not. Klaps thereupon again requested to speak to the general himself. By then, it was 0430. The line was now very bad and the two men could not hear each other. A telephone operator had to repeat what they said. Klaps told Dostler of the two telegrams he had sent requesting a delay of the execution order. He added that stories of the captured Americans were already circulating in La Spezia and that, if they were executed, word of that was certain to reach the enemy. At the other end of the line, Dostler asked his staff to show him Klaps' telegrams, then, through the operator, told Klaps that the case was decided, that the order had already been given and must be executed.

That night, March 25/26, three nights after the initial landing and as the members of the 'Ginny' party were awaiting their execution in their cell at Almers' headquarters, the second attempt to pick them up was made from Corsica. (Stormy weather had precluded an attempt to be made on the previous night, March 24/25.) Without incident, *PT 214*, now with *PT 208* (Lieutenant J. Craighead Kuhn, USNR) as No. 2 boat, reached a point 300 yards off the pinpoint by 2250. For over an hour, they watched the coast for the pre-arranged flashlight signal and tried to make radio contact by walkie-talkie, but of course to no avail. A white light blinked for two minutes at the pinpoint, but this was interpreted as an enemy attempt to lure the boats into a trap. At 0005, the boats retired and returned to base.

Nothing now could save the captured OSS men. As already described, at noon on the 25th, Oberleutnant Koerbitz had telephoned the CP of Oberleutnant Rudolph Bolze, commander of the 1. Kompanie of Festungs-Bataillon 905, instructing him to prepare a grave for the burial of 15 men. Bolze's company guarded a stretch of coastline some 12 kilometres south-east of La Spezia, known as Punta Bianca, which was actually a tongue of land along the Bocca di Magra, the mouth of the Magra river. His command post was at Villa Angelo, at the western end of the mouth near the village of Ameglia.



Bolze's company was holding a coastal sector along the mouth of the Magra river to the south-east of La Spezia. His command post was at the Villa Angelo near the village of Ameglia. The villa was owned by Dr Bisio who lived there with his family.



On the morning of March 26, the 15 Americans were brought to Villa Angelo by truck and executed at an open spot on the Punta Bianca, the western headland of the Magra river. Although the exact place of the killings cannot be established with certainty today, this is the most likely spot.

When Bolze received Koerbitz's order after he got back from an afternoon inspection, he instructed Oberfeldwebel Barowski, who was in charge of civilian labour, to dig a grave three metres wide by six metres long and one-and-a-half metres deep. Looking for a suitable place, Bolze selected an open spot near the stables, at the junction of the stables' footpath with the road to the ammo dump and to Punta Bianca. At 2100, Barowski reported the pit ready. At 2200, Koerbitz phoned again to tell Bolze that the grave was for executed American saboteurs and that they would arrive at his CP at 0600 next morning. Bolze thereupon instructed Barowski to meet him with six men at the stables the following morning. Up till now, Bolze had understood that he was only responsible for the burial, but at 2230, Koerbitz called yet again to say that the saboteurs might have to be shot at his place as well. Ordered to select a spot, Bolze suggested the tip of Punta Bianca.

Next morning, Sunday March 26, at 0500, Hauptmann Rehfeld and Lieutenant Seidenstucker with some 25 armed men of 1. Kompanie of Festungs-Bataillon 906, arrived at Almers' headquarters to collect the American prisoners. It was still dark. The 15 men were loaded in two 4-ton trucks with tarpaulin covers. The vehicles drove off, led by Rehfeld and Seidenstucker in a chauffeur-driven staff car.

During the ride, the prisoners made a final attempt to escape using the pistol stolen from Sessler. However, as Lieutenant Traficante started to draw the gun out of the pocket of his sheepskin-lined field jacket, the movement was noted by the guard sitting opposite him, who covered him immediately. There was no shooting but the whole group was again searched for weapons before the trucks continued on their way. Traficante and two other men were forced to strip off their field jacket, shirt and trousers. (Afterwards, Sessler was grilled for 13 days by Koerbitz on why he had not noticed that his pistol was missing when he had put his belt back on after he had finished his interrogations. However, Sessler got off without further repercussions.)

At 0630, the convoy arrived at Villa Angelo, where Bolze stood waiting by the road. It was just getting light. Though Rehfeld was CO of the 906th, and Bolze a company commander in the 905th, the two men knew each other.

'Good morning, Bolze', Rehfeld greeted the lieutenant. 'An unpleasant order.'

'For me also, Hauptmann', Bolze said, who reported that the grave was ready. Rehfeld then informed Bolze that the prisoners in the trucks were not dead, but had yet to be executed like Koerbitz had announced.

Bolze stepped into the passenger car and led the convoy past the waiting grave pit to Punta Bianca, about a mile further on. On arrival, Rehfeld asked Bolze where the doctor was. The lieutenant knew nothing about that, but suggested that they call the battalion doctor, Unterarzt Heinz Kellner, who was at the 905th's CP at Pugliola, five kilometres away. While Seidenstucker went to fetch him with the car, Rehfeld and Bolze inspected the site which the latter had chosen for the execution. It was a place on the road where it bent and where there was a rock wall on the right-hand side. Rehfeld wanted to place the prisoners against the mountain side but Bolze was afraid of ricochet, so they decided on a spot with the sea for background.

Walking back to the trucks, where the guards had already jumped out, Bolze looked inside, seeing the prisoners for the first time. Next, he walked some distance back down the road, out of sight of the execution site. He did not like being involved in the whole affair at all, and wanted to stay out of it as much as possible.

At 0715, Seidenstucker returned, with the doctor following in his own car, a Topolino painted white with a red cross. The doctor stopped when he saw Bolze by the side of the road, but the latter declined to jump in, so Kellner continued to the site alone.

The prisoners were taken from the trucks and marched to the execution site where they were shot in two groups, each facing a firing squad of ten men. Behind them was the sea. Their hands were tied behind their backs. After the first men had been shot, the

Germans covered their bodies with planks before bringing the second batch forward. The first salvo rang out at 0720, the second ten minutes later.

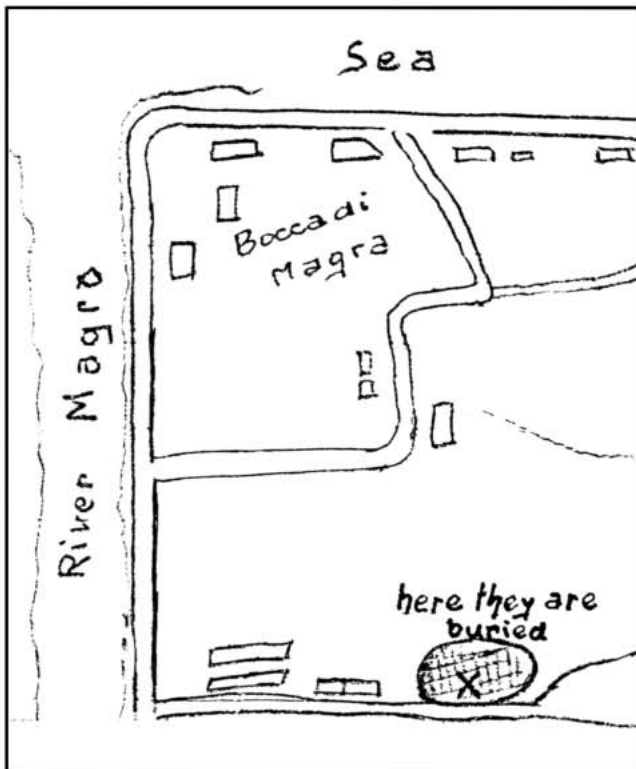
After he heard the second volley, Bolze walked back to the execution site, where the doctor was checking the bodies. To make sure that they were dead, Lieutenant Seidenstucker gave every one of the Americans a pistol shot in the neck. Bolze suddenly realised that he had completely forgotten to warn the nearby Di Lutti battery of the execution, so he walked there to explain what the gun-fire was all about. Meeting a few curious men from the battery, he told them to return to their posts and inform the battery commander, Leutnant Steinmetz. He ordered a few to get shovels and cover the blood on the ground with sand.

Meanwhile, the trucks had been turned round and the firing squad was loading the dead bodies into one of them. The planks were laid in first to prevent blood stains. The German soldiers robbed the corpses of their boots, throwing them in the back of the other truck. Bolze got into the car with Rehfeld, leaving his men to finish covering the bloody ground.

Driving back to the Villa Angelo, the trucks halted at the grave, where Barowski and his six men stood waiting. One by one, the bodies were carried to the pit. Barowski borrowed another six men from the firing squad to speed up the work. Once the bodies had been put in, the pit was covered over and some clumps of grass placed on top as camouflage. The grave was left unmarked.

Later that day, about noon, a cable arrived at the headquarters of Festungs-Brigade 135 direct from OB Südwest stating that the American soldiers were not to be shot. Someone at higher headquarters must have had second thoughts, but it was too late.

Within two days, the Italian Fascist and German radios broadcast the story that a group of American commandos had been wiped out. To camouflage the summary execution, it was said they had been killed in a skirmish. Another false rumour which was circulated to justify the execution was that the Americans had actually shot one of the guards. Kesselring must have felt ill at ease over the affair because, a fortnight after, he gave orders to all headquarters concerned that all signals appertaining to the execution must be destroyed.



Left: The Americans were buried in an unmarked mass grave near the Villa Angelo. Fourteen months later, in May 1945, Oberleutnant Bolze, now a prisoner of the Allies, drew a sketch plan of its location for Captains Albert Lanier and Nevio Manzani, the two OSS officers specially detailed to obtain information on the missing men of 'Ginny'. We found the original copy of the sketch in the Dostler case file. Above: Today, the area around the spot marked as the grave site has been developed with new villas. This is as close as Karel could pinpoint it: the back garden of a private summer house.

The OSS men captured during the 'Ginny' mission were never properly tried, they were never brought before any court or given any hearing. Clearly, their summary execution constituted a war crime.

Immediately after the Allied-German armistice in Italy on May 3, the OSS sent out a team to investigate what had become of the men of 'Ginny' and, if possible, to find their graves. The two-man team consisted of Captains Albert G. Lanier and Nevio J. Manzani of the 2671st Special Reconnaissance Battalion, Separate (Provisional), OSS (the old 2677th had been renamed in August 1944).

Starting their investigation at Bonassola, Lanier and Manzani searched the local Fascist archives there and dug up a copy of the prefect's report on the initial capture of the 'Ginny' party. As a result of this, two of the militiamen who had played a part in this — Vittorio Bertoni and Giobatta Bianchi — were arrested and detained as PoWs. Lanier and Manzani also found Franco Lagaxo, the Italian peasant witness, and took his statement on May 5.

Their first lead as to the fate of the captured men came when they found Lieutenant Bolze at the US 92nd Infantry Division PoW cage at Genoa. During questioning from May 10-13, Bolze described his part in the execution and burial, and drew a map of the location of the grave. He also named Oberst

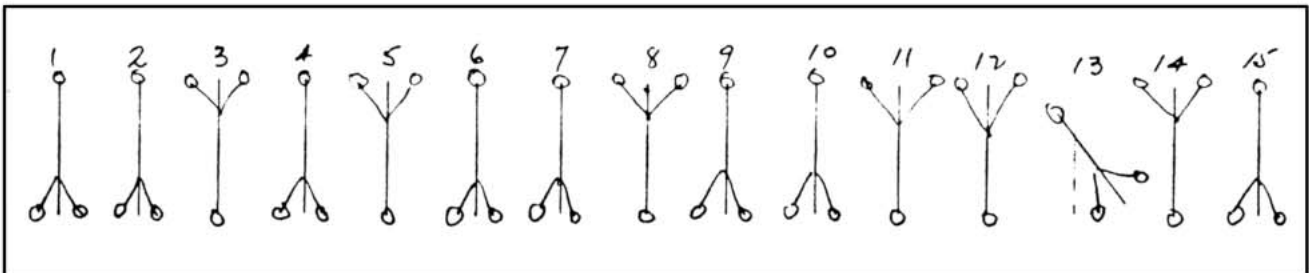
Almers and Oberleutnant Koerbitz as the ones from whom his orders had come.

Meanwhile, Kapitänleutnant Sessler, the Kriegsmarine interrogator, had been taken prisoner too. Questioned at the Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Centre (CSDIC) Sub-Centre at Florence on May 11-13, Sessler erroneously named General der Infanterie Rudolf Toussaint, the Wehrmacht plenipotentiary representative in Italy, as the one responsible for the execution order, which caused the Americans to temporarily institute a search for the wrong man.

Koerbitz was traced, as was Sessler's chief, Korvettenkapitän Klaps, and they were able to name General Dostler, thus correcting the error about Toussaint. Dostler had already been captured by the US 85th Infantry Division on May 3, and he was now formally accused of having committed a war crime. He was charged with having violated the Law of War under the Hague Convention of 1907, by having ordered the shooting of unarmed prisoners-of-war.

On May 20, Lanier and Manzani went to Punta Bianca to look for the place indicated by Bolze. With them were two medical officers, Major Clifford M. Bassett and Captain Robert J. Willoughby of the US 103rd Station Hospital; 1st Lieutenant R. L. Moseley, Staff Sergeant Eugene L. Ferris and three enlisted men of the 602nd Quarter-

master Company Graves Registration Unit; and nine Italian labourers. Having pinpointed the spot, excavations were started and, on May 23, the bodies were found. All 15 still had their hands tied behind their backs. None of them had any boots or shoes on, and three wore no outer clothing. Two of the bodies were decomposed to such a degree that Bassett and Willoughby were unable to make a satisfactory forensic examination. Of the others, all but two showed extensive fractures of the skull, usually located over the temporal bone. No bullet holes could be found in the victims' bodies or clothes. Seven of the men could be readily identified, by their dog-tags, laundry markings, rank stripes or dental records: Tech/5 Angelo Sirico, Tech/5 Joseph Libardi, Tech/Sergeant Livio Viececi, Sergeant Alfred DeFlumeri, Sergeant Dominick Mauro, Tech/5 Joseph Noia and Lieutenant Paul Traficante. On May 27, Major Pedro M. Souza, the medical officer of Company A of the 2671st Battalion, conducted a second post-mortem at the Forte dei Marmi mortuary, to where the bodies had been taken, and he was able to identify six more. Only the remains of Tech/5 Joseph M. Farrell and Tech/5 Liberty J. Tremonte could not be identified with certainty, partly because of advanced decomposition and because one of the pair had no outer clothes on him.



This is the actual sketch of the mass grave as prepared by Captain Manzani during disinterment of the bodies on May 23, 1945 and included in the Dostler case file. The bodies found were eventually identified as: [1] Tech/5 Angelo Sirico; [2] Tech/5 Joseph A. Libardi; [3] Tech/5 Santoro Calcara; [4] Tech/5 Salvatore DiScalfani; [5] Tech/Sergeant Livio Viececi;

[6] either Tech/5 Joseph M. Farrell or Tech/5 Liberty J. Tremonte; [7] Sergeant Alfred L. DeFlumeri; [8] Sergeant Dominick C. Mauro; [9] Tech/5 John J. Leone; [10] 1st Lieutenant Vincent Russo; [11] Tech/5 Joseph Noia; [12] Tech/5 Rosario F. Squatrito; [13] 1st Lieutenant Paul J. Traficante; [14] Tech/5 Thomas N. Savino; [15] either Farrell or Tremonte.

And so on to the Dostler trial. Just before the start of the proceedings, Colonel Claudius Wolfe, defence counsel (right), talks with General Dostler (centre) and General der Infanterie Fridolin von Senger und Etterlin (left), present at the trial as special German counsel at Dostler's request. In his 1960 memoirs, von Senger remembers: 'I knew Dostler and esteemed him as a good comrade. I could only speak to him when counsel designated for his defence, the American Colonel Wolfe, wanted to consult him, which was often enough. The colonel took his job seriously, even if he usually seemed pressed for time. He inspired us with confidence. We were moved to Rome for the trial. This meant a deterioration for me, since we were housed in Cinécitta, the Roman Hollywood, in solitary confinement and without any reading matter. As an authority on conditions in the Wehrmacht, I was treated in the same way as the accused. In the circumstances, I would have preferred to share the company of Dostler. Each morning, we were driven through Rome to the Law Courts in a prison van, its siren screeching continuously. The trial had attracted many spectators, mostly war reporters and other journalists of both sexes. In the intervals of the trial, we went over the proceedings in our own circle, which included the two American defence counsel and members of our guard. They were pleased whenever the situation seemed to favour Dostler.'



In anticipation of the trial against Dostler, all German and Italian prisoners involved in the case, including Dostler himself, were concentrated at US PoW Enclosure No. 326 at Aversa, near Naples. However, several important witnesses needed by the defence would not be present at the trial: Oberst Almers had been captured, but he had escaped before a statement was taken from him and he had not been recaptured; other vital witnesses, like Oberst Kraehe, Dostler's chief-of-staff, and other LXXXV. Armee-korps staff officers, or Hauptmann Rehfeld and Leutnant Seidenstucker of Festungs-Bataillon 906, could not be traced in the American and British zones.

On September 23, 1945, Headquarters Mediterranean Theater of Operations issued its 'Regulations for the Trial of War Criminals' and, on the 26th, the Theater's Judge Advocate General's Department set up a Military Commission of nine officers, chaired by Major General Lawrence C. Jaynes, 'for the trial of such persons as may properly be brought before it'.

The Dostler trial was held at the Palace of Justice in Rome and lasted five days, October 8-12. Acting for the prosecution were Major Frederick W. Roche and 1st Lieutenant William T. Andrew Jr. Acting as defence counsel were Colonel Claudius O. Wolfe and Major Cecil K. Emery. Before the trial, Dostler, who spoke very little English, had asked a fellow prisoner at Aversa, General der Infanterie Fridolin von Senger und Etterlin, former commander of the XIV. Panzerkorps in Italy and a noted linguist, to assist and advise him during the trial. Although not a juridical specialist, von Senger agreed and the court granted him the status of special German counsel for the accused.

As Dostler was the first German general to be brought to trial as a war criminal, and the first German general to stand before an American military commission, the trial was widely covered by the Press. Another reason that it was closely followed by observers was that the verdict, no matter which way it went, was bound to set some sort of precedent for the subsequent plethora of war crime trials — including the Nuremberg trial of major

war criminals, which was scheduled to open the following month.

Right at the beginning of the trial, the defence questioned the jurisdiction of the court pleading that, as a PoW, the accused was entitled, under the Geneva Convention of 1929, to a trial by court-martial (which offers the accused a higher degree of safeguards) and by officers of equal rank, rather than by a military commission. The Commission rejected this argument on the grounds that this rule only pertained to offences committed by a PoW in captivity, and not to offences committed to the Law of Nations prior to his becoming a prisoner.

The defence next argued that the Commis-

sion had no jurisdiction as it should legally have been set up by the Supreme Allied Commander in the Mediterranean (the British Field-Marshal Sir Harold Alexander) or by the US President, and not by the Supreme US Commander in the Mediterranean, Lieutenant General Joseph T. McNarney. The Commission overruled this plea as well.

The court then proceeded to the hearing of witnesses. Those for the prosecution included Captains Materazzi and Lanier of the OSS, Giobatta Bianchi, Koerbitz (by deposition), Klaps, Sessler (by deposition), Bolze, and von Zangen. Called into the box for the defence were von Senger, again von Zangen and Dostler himself.



Major Frederick Roche, of the office of the Judge advocate General and prosecutor at the trial, swears in the military commission's judges: Major General Lawrence C. Jaynes (President, in centre), Brigadier General Thoburn K. Brown (to Jaynes' right), Colonel Harrison Shaler, Colonel James Notestein (replacing Colonel Robert C. Ross) and Colonel Franklin T. Hammond. (USNA)



Next, Roche swears in the defense counsel, Colonel Wolfe, and his assistant, Major Cecil Emery. (USNA)

The decisive facts of the case were not controversial, namely that the victims had been members of the US Army carrying out a bona fide military mission in proper uniform, that Dostler had ordered their shooting without trial, and that they had been so shot.

Dostler and his counsel built their defence around a plea of superior orders: the Führerbefehl of October 18, 1942, and orders received from higher headquarters. The Führerbefehl had instigated Dostler to issue his first order to shoot the men, but, so he

claimed, he had revoked this order. The actual order for the execution had been issued by higher headquarters, notably Armeegruppe von Zangen and OB Südwest, and Dostler had only passed it on as a channel of communications.

As regards the Führerbefehl, von Senger, von Zangen and Dostler all three described the special oath of obedience to Hitler which all officers of the Wehrmacht had had to take and from which they could not shirk, even if they disagreed with it or thought it against International Law. The defence invoked that the Führerbefehl in its first sentence referred to the Geneva Convention and represented itself as a reprisal order made in view of the alleged illegal methods of warfare employed by the Allies. Since the Geneva Convention recognized retaliation as lawful, so the counsel argued, Dostler had a perfect right to believe that the order, as a reprisal order, was legitimate.

The prosecution upheld the argument that the Führerbefehl was illegal, basing itself on Article 2, Paragraph 3 of the Prisoners-of-War Convention of 1929, which said that measures of reprisal against PoWs are forbidden. They further argued that, quite apart from that, Dostler had exceeded the terms of the Führerbefehl, since it clearly stipulated that commandos, if captured alive, should be handed over to the Sicherheitsdienst, not executed. Against this, Dostler claimed that the text of the Führerbefehl as introduced at the trial was not the full order as in effect at the time, asserting that by March 1944 it included important supplements listing the various categories of operations which came under it and prescribing that sabotage troops were to be executed after interrogation. Von Senger confirmed having seen a Führerbefehl on the same subject but different in



The Palace of Justice in Rome is the nerve centre of the Italian juridical apparatus fighting the country's organised crime and, even more so than most other administrative buildings in Italy, heavily guarded by armed gendarmes. The Aula per la Difesa della Patria lies in the heart of the huge building and Karel had great difficulty in getting special permission to take comparison photographs.

Left: On the third day of the trial, Dostler himself is sworn in by Major Roche, as he is about to testify at his own trial. Aged 55, he had a lifetime in the army behind him. Born in Munich on May 10, 1891, Dostler joined the Bayerische Infanterie-Regiment 5 in 1910, ending the First World War as an Oberleutnant. After he became a general staff officer in 1924, he was assigned to the Reichswehr Ministry, then in 1927 to Wehrkreis München, in 1932 to Artillerie-Kommando 5, and later that same year to the 15. Infanterie-Division. In 1937, he became la (personnel officer) of Heeresgruppe 4 at Leipzig, transferring in 1938 to the 7. Armee in the West Wall. The outbreak of war accelerated his career: in February 1941 he became chief-of-staff of XXV. Armeekorps in France, then in October commander of the 57. Infanterie-Division in Russia. After sick leave in Germany from March to July 1942, he was assigned command of the 163. Division in Finland. In January 1943, he was appointed Chief of Air Supply of the Kuban Beachhead in southern Russia, in May acting chief-of-staff of LII. Armeekorps, in June commander of XLII. Armeekorps, and in October of VII. Armeekorps at Kiev. In January 1944, he was transferred to Italy to assume command of LXXV. Armeekorps. It was during this tenure, that the 'Ginny' Mission affair took place. Finally, from September 1944 to the end of the war, he commanded LXXIII. Armeekorps. He was captured by advance units of the US Fifth Army while trying to extract a battalion from a partisan attack, surrendering formally to Major General John B. Coulter of the US 85th Division at Calazzo on May 3. (USNA)



Dostler, with Sergeant Albert Hirschman, his interpreter, beside him, reads out a document during his questioning by Colonel Wolfe (standing on left). Note the large number of cameramen and photographers, and the balcony crowded with newspaper reporters. (USNA)

contents in late 1943; von Zangen could remember no amendments to the Befehl of October 1942.

On another line, Dostler argued that the very fact that he had not been disciplined for his action, although the Befehl threatened anyone who failed to carry it out with a war tribunal, proved that his superiors had approved of it.

As regards the orders from higher headquarters, this defence plea could not be substantiated. When questioned, von Zangen denied having given the order for the execution, claiming he was absent from his headquarters on that particular day. This left open the possibility that his chief-of-staff, Oberst Walter Nagel, had issued the order, but von Zangen could not confirm this and no other members of his Armeegruppe staff were available for testimony. As far as OB Südwest was concerned, a statement by one witness that, a few hours after the execution,

an order had come from this headquarters not to shoot the prisoners, was accepted as a rebuttal of this claim.

In its verdict, the Commission overruled both parts of the defence plea of superior orders. On October 12, the court found the accused guilty and sentenced him to death by musketry.

Although it could not be reported in the press during the trial, for fear of giving the semblance of bias to the general public, the Dostler case evoked tremendous discussion in the Mediterranean Theater. The central issue of the trial — whether an officer of general rank was responsible for a violation of the laws of war even if he commits it following explicit orders from above — was not lost on senior officers of the regular US Army. Many were most uncomfortable about the verdict and not a few openly said so.

Generaloberst Heinrich von Vietinghoff, Kesselring's successor as OB Südwest in Italy and Dostler's last supreme commander, made an appeal for mercy for Dostler to the Supreme Allied Commander in the Mediterranean, Lieutenant-General Sir William Morgan, on October 14. Dostler himself petitioned for further investigations and mercy on October 24. He complained that important witnesses — such as von Zangen's chief-of-staff, Nagel, or the supreme commander,





During a pause, Colonel Wolfe confers with Dostler and von Senger. Hirschman, the interpreter, sits in between. This and other trial pictures taken by Signal Corps photographer Brown, one of the many cameramen from both the services and the civilian press who were present to cover the trial. (USNA)

Kesselring — had not been heard; nor had his own chief-of-staff, Oberst Kraehe or Oberst Almers.

For a while, the defence entertained hope that the execution, initially scheduled for the middle of November, might be postponed on the theory that the Nuremberg prosecution might want Dostler as a witness. Major Roche, the prosecutor, took the trial record to Germany but officials there were not interested.

On November 27, Lieutenant General Matthew B. Ridgway, McNarney's successor as Mediterranean Theater Commander — although he was known to have deplored inheriting the responsibility for this particular case — approved and confirmed the death sentence.



Above: Dostler, Hirschman, von Senger, Wolfe and Emery study a copy of the Führerbefehl of October 18, 1942, which played such a prominent part in Dostler's decision to have the American saboteurs executed, and then in the trial convicting that act as a crime of war. The Befehl stipulated that all enemy encountered in so-called Commando actions were to be eliminated in combat and, if captured alive, not to be treated as PoWs but handed over to the Sicherheitsdienst. Left: General Gustav von Zangen, former commander of Armeegruppe von Zangen and Dostler's immediate superior at the time of the 'Ginny' affair, is sworn in. He confirmed that Wehrmacht officers, by their personal oath to Hitler, could not disobey a Führerbefehl, even if they disapproved of it. In spite of this, the judges found Dostler guilty and sentenced him to be shot by musketry. With the passage of time, and in fairness to Dostler, there seems to be some injustice in the verdict. In particular, Dostler's plea that he had only re-issued the order on explicit instructions from above (either Armeegruppe von Zangen or OB Südwest) was not really negated by von Zangen's statement that he himself had not issued or passed on such an order (he admitted that his chief-of-staff could have done so in his absence), nor by the fact that within hours of the execution Kesselring's OB Südwest issued a countermanding order — which does not rule out that it had itself given out such an order initially. With hindsight, it seems that Kesselring, and to a lesser extent von Zangen, should have carried as much blame, if not more, for the execution order as Dostler. (USNA)



The execution took place at the US Peninsular Base Section Garrison Stockade No. 1 at Aversa. According to local historian Giovanni Motti, the Aversa stockade was situated along and to the west of Route 7bis, the Naples to Aversa road, some three kilometres south of Aversa at a locality known as Fondo San Felice. It comprised an area of some 30,000 square metres, enclosed by barbed wire and with four guard posts. Head-

quarters and quarters for VIP prisoners were in wooden huts, but the guards and ordinary prisoners lived in tents. At the rear of the stockade was a shooting range, surrounded on four sides by a mound of excavated earth. According to local farmer Francesco Verde, who as a young man of 20 witnessed Dostler's execution from afar, there was also a trapdoor gallows at the prison camp.

For the execution, Dostler was transferred from PoW Enclosure No. 326 to the Peninsular Base Section Garrison Stockade No. 1, which was also located near Aversa. This military prison camp, run by the 803rd Military Police Battalion, had a firing range suitable for executions. From his quarters, Dostler could witness the rehearsal of the firing squad. The day before the execution, General von Senger was brought to see Dostler in his cell. As von Senger recalled

later: 'He was his usual self, cheerful and relaxed, explaining that he only wanted to thank me for my friendship and good offices and to bid me farewell, as he was due to be shot next morning. Too moved to speak, I stood there looking him in the face, this comrade with smiling eyes who in adversity had become my friend.'

On the morning of Saturday, December 1, Dostler was led to the stockade's firing pit, over which hung a thin morning mist. With

an American and German chaplain comforting him in his last minutes, the general was tied to a stake. Next, the verdict and the names of the 15 men executed at his order were read out to him. A black hood was put over his face, and a white target marker pinned to his chest. Shortly after 8 a.m., General Dostler died before the rifles of a 12-man firing squad. He now lies buried at the German War Cemetery at Pomezia, some 20 miles south-east of Rome.



Today, nothing remains of the camp or the shooting range, the whole area having been reverted to orchard grove and wasteland.



Left: At 7.55 a.m., the prisoner was delivered to the firing range by a three-man guard, consisting of 2nd Lieutenant Walter L. Wyllie and Corporals Gordon W. Wilkinson and James W. Murray. Lieutenant Wyllie, who had been assigned to look after the prisoner during his last days, said afterwards of Dostler: 'He said that he believed that his trial could have been more just by having his witnesses here. But he said "I understand the American people believe in justice and I want you to thank each and every person concerned for the courtesies extended in my case".' Present to assist and comfort Dostler in his last minutes were two Catholic chaplains, one of the US



Army, Captain H. B. Crummins (right), and one a German PoW, Pfarrer Franz Gruber (half hidden with his back to the camera). As he was being roped, Dostler said 'Es lebe Deutschland' (Long live Germany), confiding in a quieter voice: 'I give my life to my country and my soul to God.' With taut face and tight-set lips, Dostler here listens as the order for his execution, containing the names of the 15 Americans executed at his order 21 months earlier, is read out to him. **Right:** Captain Arthur N. Lieberman of the US Medical Corps pins a marker over Dostler's heart as a target for the firing squad. The general's face has already been covered with a black hood. (USNA)



With the morning sun casting a long shadow, the firing squad, commanded by 1st Lieutenant John H. Magnocavallo, takes aim. The 12 enlisted men composing the squad were 1st Sergeant Howard L. Laux, Corporal Clyde L. Randall, Pfc's Jack R. Freeman and Edward C. Anderson, and Privates Lamar E. Roche, Joseph V. Cumberland, Fred J. Wilkerson, John S.

Gardner Jr, Clyde Herrington Jr, Calvin C. Gardner, Daniel Herteg and Edward J. Deveau, with Private Ralph R. Buckner as reserve. At the rear, assigned to watch over the execution, stands a special guard of 12 enlisted men from Company B of the 803rd Military Police Battalion, led by 1st Lieutenant Frank W. Cady. (USNA)



Death of a German general. US Signal Corps photographer Blomgren captured the split-second when the salvo hit Dostler.



Left: Dr Lieberman (who has just declared Dostler dead) looks on as Captain Crummins and Pfarrer Gruber read the last rites over the general's slumped body. *Above:* Cut loose from the death post, Dostler's body is put into a mattress cover before being taken away. (USNA)



Above: Today, Dostler lies buried at the Deutscher Soldatenfriedhof Pomezia, south of Rome, in communal Grave H-94 (top right). Note that Gefreiter Roman Forstner and Oberjäger Karl Kremser died, like Dostler, after the end of hostilities in Italy. The Pomezia Cemetery was dedicated in May 1960 and contains over 27,000 German dead of World War II. Below: Some of the men shot on Dostler's order remain, like him, buried in Italy. The 15 men disinterred at Punta Bianca were initially buried at the temporary US cemetery at Follonica. Most of them were later repatriated to the United States, but seven still rest in Italy, at the Florence US Military Cemetery (right). These are the graves of Joseph Libardi (Grave G-11-28), Alfred DeFlumeri (Grave G-11-15) and Liberty Tremonte (Grave F-5-36). Note that the date on the crosses of Libardi and DeFlumeri is wrong — March 23 instead of 26 — and that Tremonte's cross is the only one naming the OSS unit they belonged to.





Few places in the world can lay claim to having been attacked by both Germany and Japan during the Second World War. This unique and unenviable fate befell the tiny Pacific island of Nauru, a British Commonwealth possession and important source of mineral phosphate. Following a German naval attack and aborted landing in 1940, Nauru was occupied by the Japanese in 1942 who then transformed the remote atoll into a heavily defended stronghold. Subject to frequent American air attacks, the island was wisely bypassed and isolated during the seizure of Tarawa, the garrison surrendering to Australian forces in September 1945.

Situated in a remote area of the Central Pacific Ocean, the tiny island of Nauru lies 47 kilometres south of the equator, approximately 2,500 miles south-west of Hawaii. A single raised coral atoll of 21 square kilometres, it was first discovered in 1798 by Captain John Fearn of the British ship *Hunter* who, attracted to its lush, tropical appearance, named it Pleasant Island. There was little contact between the natives and Europeans until the 1830s when whalers began calling. Fifty years later, German traders who had settled on the atoll sought incorporation into Germany's Marshall Islands Protectorate, and a formal annexation took place in October 1888 with the arrival of the gunboat *Eber*.

In 1899 it was discovered, quite by accident, that Nauru was essentially an enormous deposit of guano, the excrement of sea birds built up over hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Chemical analysis of a rock sample in the Sydney office of the British Pacific Islands Company revealed high-grade phosphate of lime, an important raw material in fertiliser manufacture. Although they held sole mining rights on the island, the Germans were apparently unaware of the wealth beneath their feet. Lengthy negotiations were held between the German company Jaluit Gesellschaft and the Pacific Phosphate Company before a mining deal was finally struck, the agreement culminating on June 27, 1907, with the first loading of Nauru phosphate onto the SS *Fido*. During the next six months, 11,630 tons of the valuable fertiliser were hand-dug and shipped to Australia, and by the end of 1913 over 630,000 tons of the mineral had been exported to meet an increasing world demand.

With the outbreak of the First World War on August 4, 1914, British and German co-workers on Nauru suddenly became enemies. The German administrator, Herr

NAURU

W. Wostrack, proclaimed a state of martial law and deported the British subjects to nearby Ocean Island. However, Wostrack decided against trying to defend the island, and surrendered it on September 9 to a landing party from HMAS *Melbourne*. On November 3, an Australian occupation force under Major-General W. Holmes arrived from Rabaul aboard the SS *Messina*. A small garrison of 50 men plus ancillaries was established under Captain E. C. Norrie. The British Nauru workers were returned to Nauru and 23 Germans shipped to Australia for internment. Phosphate mining resumed and continued throughout the war.

On the morning of December 15, 1914, two Japanese cruisers and a transport arrived off Nauru, whereupon Japanese officers

By David M. Green

supposedly came ashore to officially verify the state of occupation. Conjecture exists as to whether the Japanese had arrived too late to seize Nauru, as they had earlier done with other former German Pacific colonies such as Palau (see *After the Battle* No. 76).

In 1919, the newly-formed League of Nations conferred a joint mandate for Nauru's jurisdiction to Australia, Britain and New Zealand. An Australian administrator was installed with a board of commissioners representing each partner country. The end of the war signalled a growth in primary production with both Australia and New Zealand requiring increased amounts of fertiliser. Facilities on Nauru were improved to meet this demand with 4.3 million tons of the valuable phosphate exported between 1933 and 1939. The declaration of war with Germany in September 1939 brought little cause for alarm on the remote Pacific mining colony until the following year when the Kriegsmarine returned.

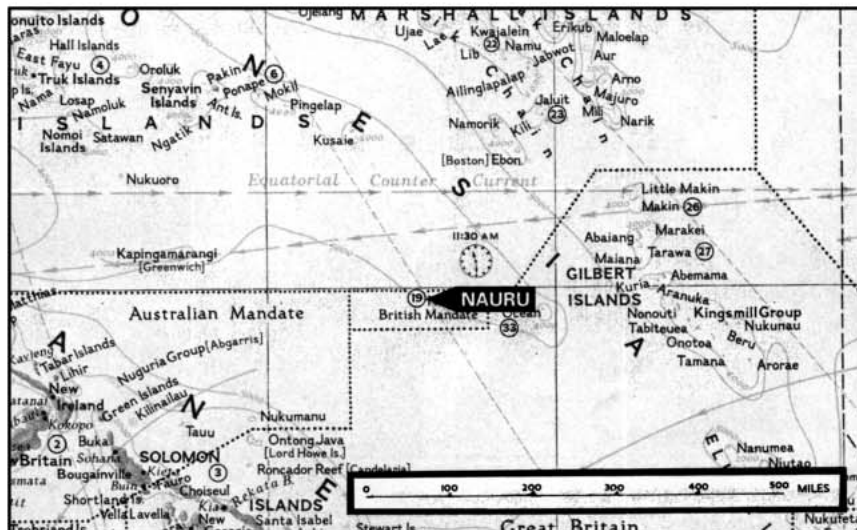


When war broke out in 1939, the tiny Central Pacific island of Nauru, situated some 1,800 miles north-east of the Australian mainland, was jointly administered under a League of Nations mandate by Australia, Britain and New Zealand. Economically important because of the presence of phosphate rock, used as agricultural fertiliser, it was a coveted possession of many nations including Germany (of which it had been a colony from 1888 to 1918) and Japan. From this, Nauru gained the unique distinction of being the only place in the world to have been attacked by both Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. In addition, the atoll became the target of Allied bombers later in the war. Above: Nauru under attack by Liberators of the US Seventh Air Force.

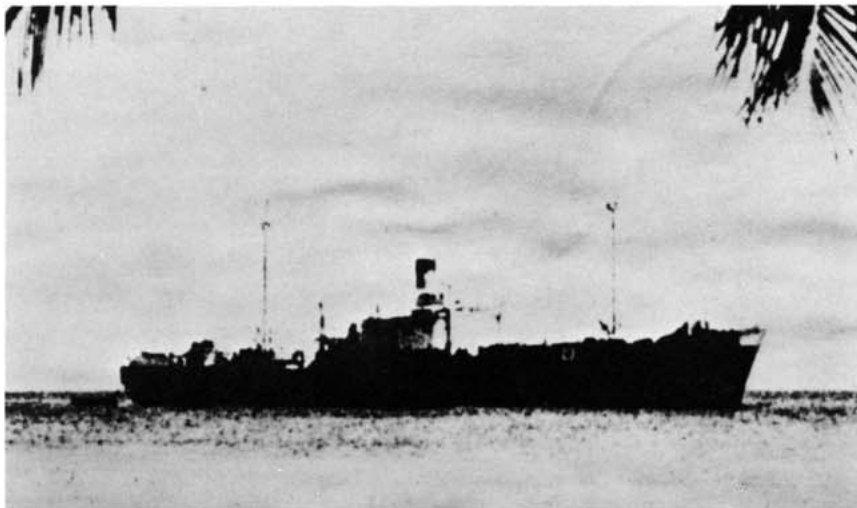
THE GERMAN ATTACK

Nauru was beset with bad weather during the first week of December 1940 which prevented the loading of phosphate onto carrier vessels. Without a sheltered anchorage, ships awaiting their cargo were forced to drift off the island until the rough seas abated. In such conditions it was not unusual to find several vessels in the vicinity of the island at any one time. Naval protection was unavailable, and shore defences non-existent under the terms of the mandate.

Prowling the waters east of New Zealand at this time were three ships, masquerading as Japanese merchantmen, which comprised the German Kreuzergeschwader — the Far East Squadron. Despite a deceptively non-belligerent appearance, the ships were in fact the heavily-armed auxiliary cruisers *Orion* and *Komet* (disguised respectively as the *Maebasi Maru* and *Manyo Maru*) and the supply ship *Kulmerland*. On November 24, the captains of the German raiders met to discuss a possible landing on Nauru, and it was later agreed that a combined force of 185 men would land to destroy the phosphate works and capture any shipping. During the raid, Allied prisoners currently held in cramped quarters below decks on the German ships would be transferred ashore.



Situated in the sea passage between the Marshall and Gilbert Islands in the north and the Solomons archipelago in the south, Nauru also represented a military position of strategic importance for both Japan and the Allies. However, the first attack on it was to be launched by the Germans.



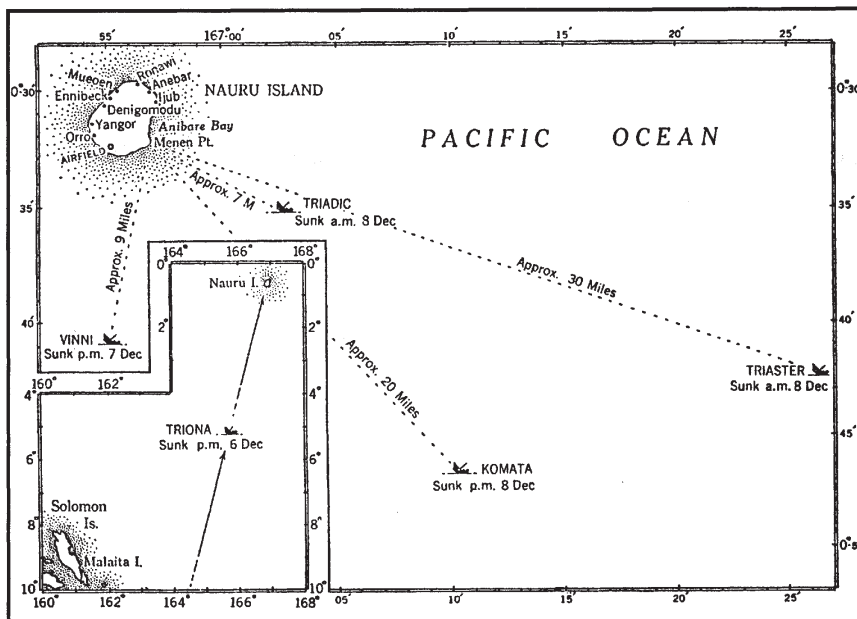
During the war, the Kriegsmarine took to the ruse of using auxiliary cruisers disguised as innocent merchantmen. One such force, composed of the *Komet* (above) and *Orion* plus the supply ship *Kulmerland*, posing as Japanese ships at a time when Japan was not yet at war, was operating off Nauru in early December 1940. (AWM)

The German operation against Nauru began on December 6 when the squadron intercepted the British Phosphate Commission vessel *Triona* after a nine-hour chase. A 4,413-ton phosphate carrier, it was sunk by the *Orion* while the faster and more mechanically reliable *Komet* steamed ahead to reconnoitre. Next day, the *Komet* intercepted and sank the 5,181-ton Norwegian motor vessel *Vinni*, which had been waiting offshore for a week to receive its cargo. Through heavy rain squalls the 'camouflaged' *Komet* was observed from Nauru and assumed to be a Japanese merchantman returning home.

On the morning of December 8, the three German ships rendezvoused off the tiny atoll. Prevailing high seas prohibited a landing but provided several unfortunate victims. Following a meeting of the German captains, *Orion* circumnavigated the island from the south, sighting the 6,378-ton *Triadic*. Refusing to stop when signalled by the Japanese mystery ship, the Phosphate Commission motor ship was immediately shelled and set alight, its demise being

watched helplessly by those ashore. Discovering a further target, *Kulmerland* was ordered to pick up survivors while *Orion* stalked and sank the smaller *Triaster* (6,032 tons). *Komet*, meanwhile, had begun searching the area north of Nauru and rounded the island to pick up a boat of survivors from the *Triadic*. The sole remaining ship in the vicinity was the four-masted *Komata*, the 3,900-ton New Zealand steamer being despatched by *Komet's* 15cm guns approximately 20 miles off the island. Although a land assault had been impossible, the raid had nevertheless netted five Allied ships with a combined tonnage of over 25,000 tons.

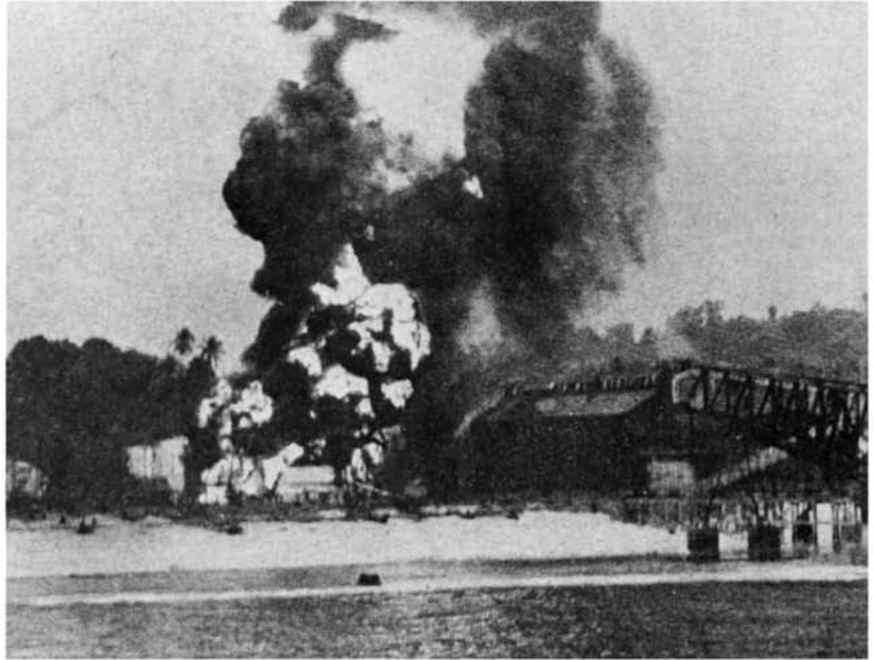
Totally ignorant of the German presence, the Nauruan administrator alerted the Australian Naval Board to the presence of the strange Japanese ship observed the previous night and the two unexpected, and apparently Japanese, ships standing by the burning *Triadic*. The communiqué continued: 'Other British and Allied vessels which are drifting on account of weather and which should be in vicinity of *Triadic* but which have not been sighted and which have not communicated anything untoward are *Triaster*, *Komata*, *Vinni*, *Triona* due Nauru 8th December.'



In just three days, the German raiders managed to sink five Allied ships.



Right: On December 27, *Komet* returned to Nauru alone and began shelling the installations ashore, setting fire to the oil tanks and damaging the phosphate works and loading wharfs. Above: From its deck, the crew of the *Komet* observe the destruction they wrought.



The Australian Naval Board responded to the situation by ordering all ships bound for the area to disperse and sail for either Fiji or New Guinea. Authorities in Australia and Nauru were unaware of the total number of ships lost or of the size of the enemy force involved but, in any case, little could be done with the closest naval vessel, the armed merchant cruiser HMAS *Manoora*, 2,400 miles away at Darwin, Northern Australia.

From Nauru the German squadron dispersed, *Kumerland* and *Komet* refuelling at Ailingapalap in the Marshalls, while *Orion* sailed towards Ponape in the Caroline Islands. Regrouping on December 15, the three ships were forced to abandon a second attempt at landing on Nauru due to continuing high seas. Having intercepted radio broadcasts revealing that Allied shipping was ordered to avoid Nauru, the Germans departed for the seclusion of the Bismarck Archipelago. When they arrived at remote Emirau Island, 514 prisoners from the three ships were provisioned with food, kerosene and rifles and put ashore. Free of prisoners, apart from 150 retained as a security shield, the Far East Squadron disbanded, *Kumerland* travelling to Japan for supplies while *Orion* met up with the tanker *Ole Jacob* and supply ship *Regensburg* during a refit at Lamotrek.

Following an unsuccessful attempt to lay



Konteradmiral Robert Eyssen, *Komet*'s commander, was awarded the Knight's Cross for his Nauru exploits.

mines off Rabaul in New Britain, *Komet* sailed again for Nauru, the innocent-looking raider returning on the morning of December 27. Several warnings were signalled to the shore by Morse lamp to refrain from wireless communication and to evacuate the phosphate plant, and a warning shot was

fired to scatter the natives on the waterfront. Hoisting the German flag and draping another ensign over the Japanese hull markings, the raider then opened fire at 6.40 a.m. Steaming in close, *Komet* systematically shelled the installations, setting fire to 13,000 tons of oil and extensively damaging the phosphate works, storage bins, and mooring facilities. In the words of one resident: 'The Germans played fair, attacked only military objectives and were away in time for us to enjoy a late breakfast.'

The two attacks on Nauru and its shipping proved to be Germany's most successful Pacific wartime undertaking. Repercussions were immediately felt with a ten-week delay in phosphate shipments bound for Australia and New Zealand, a problem further compounded by a lack of suitable phosphate carriers. The German naval presence caused considerable rethinking and alteration to the disposition of Allied naval forces in the area. *Komet*'s shelling of Nauru was the sole attack carried out by a German raider against a land target during the war. In Tokyo, the German naval attaché reported Japan's annoyance over the bombardment and interference to phosphate supplies. Meanwhile, German naval staff in Berlin cautiously recognised the success of *Komet*'s operation, while forbidding such actions outside of operational orders in future.



Five years later, when the Australians reoccupied Nauru, the cantilever wrecked by the *Komet* was still unserviceable.



Though needed to carry the phosphate across the shallow reef to ships anchored offshore, it was not repaired until 1948.



Likewise, the oil drums set afire by the German raider still lay bent and buckled in September 1945. The German attack lasted one hour and 18 minutes, during which 126 5.9-inch, 360 3.7cm and 719 2cm rounds were fired causing extensive damage and stopping all phosphate operations for ten full weeks.



Even before the German foray, on June 12, 1940, the Italian merchantman *Romolo* was scuttled off Nauru after interception by the Australian armed merchant cruiser HMAS *Manoora*. Thus, in a way, the third Axis power — Fascist Italy — figured in the island's wartime history too. (AWM)

JAPANESE OCCUPATION

As a consequence of the earlier German attack, a small Australian garrison of about 50 men with two field guns was established on Nauru under captain J. C. King, a request for 6-inch coastal guns and two aircraft having been refused due to their unavailability. The day after the attack on Pearl Harbor, a Japanese flying boat circled Nauru, foreshadowing Imperial intentions. With Japan's expanding Pacific territory drawing closer, the army contingent, together with many residents, were evacuated by the Free French destroyer *Le Triomphant* on February 23, 1942, leaving behind the administrator, Lieutenant-Colonel F. R. Chalmers, together with six other Europeans, native Nauruans and foreign mining workers.

The Japanese plan for invading Nauru was a small part of a complex operation known as 'MO' (abbreviated from Port Moresby). Its objectives involved the establishment of a seaplane base at Tulagi in the Solomon Islands, an amphibious assault on Port Moresby, and the seizure of Nauru and Ocean Island. In charge of 'MO' was Vice Admiral Shigeyoshi Inouye, commander of the Japanese Fourth Fleet. His planning also envisaged the intervention of an American carrier task force which would be trapped in the Coral Sea between his aircraft carriers and the naval aircraft based at Rabaul.

Countering the Port Moresby invasion force, the Americans deployed their aircraft carriers as anticipated. The ensuing Battle of the Coral Sea was hailed as a victory by both sides; the Americans destroying the Tulagi seaplane base, sinking the carrier *Shoho* and damaging the *Shokaku*; the Japanese sinking the carrier *Lexington*. Ever-cautious, Admiral Inouye had earlier delayed the Port Moresby invasion because of the American naval threat. Now, encountering increased Allied air activity, he postponed it indefinitely.

Inouye subsequently dispatched the Nauru and Ocean Island invasion group on May 10, 1942, supplemented by units from the former Port Moresby force. Faced with the sinking of the fleet flagship, *Okinoshima*, by the US Submarine *S42* on May 11, and intelligence reports of American carriers off Tulagi, the admiral ordered his fleet to Truk.

The Japanese attack on Nauru eventually took place on the night of August 23/24, opening with a naval bombardment and followed three days later by the landing of Japanese marines. Representatives from The South Seas Development Company arrived soon afterwards to investigate resumption of phosphate production using native labour. This idea was soon abandoned, with Nauru assuming a more strategic rôle as part of Japan's Pacific island defensive chain.



Finally captured by the Japanese in August 1942, Nauru became one of the many island strongholds in the Empire's defensive chain protecting its Pacific conquests. Expecting an Allied attack any day, the Japanese strongly reinforced the little atoll, building numerous pillboxes and gun emplacements. The garrison also included these four Type 95 light tanks — all of which were found parked under canvas next to one of the burnt-out oil tanks by the Australians when they occupied the island in September 1945. (AWM)



The oil storage tanks were replaced by new ones during the post-war reconstruction.

Right: Inland from the beaches, the Japanese placed four Type 89 (1929) dual 127mm naval anti-aircraft guns in revolving turrets. Their rusty remains survive to this day in the lush undergrowth.

OPERATION 'GALVANIC'

Following the American and British Combined Chiefs-of-Staff meeting in Washington in May 1943, it was decided to begin offensive operations against Japan through the Central Pacific region. After examining possible options, it was agreed to invade both the Gilbert Islands and Nauru in an operation Admiral Chester W. Nimitz code-named 'Galvanic' (see *After the Battle* No. 15).

The invasion of Nauru was assigned to the US 27th Infantry Division, a former New York National Guard unit. Initial planning had assigned the entire division to the assault, with two regiments landing on the north-west coast of the island and the third held afloat in reserve. However, the decision to take Nauru was not universally shared. The atoll lacked sheltered waters and possessed only a small airfield. Any strategic value in capturing the island would be offset by potentially high casualties. With Nauru situated 390 miles from the western Gilbert Islands, simultaneous amphibious landings would also strain available shipping resources and disperse a fleet which faced the possibility of Japanese naval counter-attack.



Left: Not far from 'Jim' is another 127mm piece. Note that the barrels have been 'bulged' by the Australians after the Japanese



surrender to inactivate the weapon. **Right:** A third 127mm dual gun survives at what is now known as Command Ridge.



Left: There were also several concrete-roofed emplacements for 80mm guns like this one being inspected by a soldier of the 31/51st Infantry Battalion. (AWM) **Right:** Today, the guns are gone and only the mountings remain, this particular bunker



being sited outside the Menen Hotel. Before 1943, this was the site of a Nauruan leper colony but on July 12, 1943, the Japanese radically solved the leper problem when they placed 49 lepers on a small boat and sank it by gun-fire.



In addition to exterminating the leper colony, the Japanese committed numerous other atrocities on Nauru. Early in 1943, the US Seventh Air Force was charged with neutralising Japanese targets on Nauru and the Gilberts. One particular raid on the night of March 25/26, destroyed eight bombers and seven fighters at the newly-completed Nauru airbase. In retaliation, the senior Japanese officer, Lieutenant-Commander Nakayama ordered the execution of Lieutenant-Colonel F. R. Chalmers, the former Australian administrator who had stayed behind when the garrison evacuated the island in February 1942, and five other Europeans the next morning. This memorial (above left) is dedicated to them and others — Nauruans, Gilbert and Ellice islanders and Chinese — who lost their lives during the Japanese occupation of 1942-45.



Above left: 'Pilot Officer L. Marquis, interpreter, RAAF, checking the details of a Japanese 25mm anti-aircraft gun found soon after the island was occupied by troops of the 31st/51st Infantry Battalion.' (AWM) The original caption describes one of the island's three Type 96 (1936) 25mm machine cannon twin mounts, one of which is now on display (above right) near the boat harbour. The rusting relic in the foreground is a magazine for the cannon located inland. Left: Pedestal mounting for a Type 93 (1933) 13.2mm machine gun surviving in the Command Ridge area. Right: David also found numerous other remnants of Japanese defensive positions, like this dugout, overgrown and deteriorating after 50 years of neglect.







On September 24, Nimitz received a recommendation from Admiral Raymond A. Spruance to cancel the Nauru landings. Makin Atoll was proposed as the better alternative, offering superior beaches, a lagoon, smaller Japanese garrison and ample room for airstrip construction, and in October a revised Operation 'Galvanic' was issued, detailing proposed landings on Tarawa, Apamama and Makin. Any threat posed by Nauru during the Gilberts operation was to be removed by carrier strikes, naval bombardment and bombing missions flown by the American Seventh Air Force.

Following a preliminary bombardment, American GIs stormed the beaches of Makin on November 20. Pitted against them were 800 Japanese defenders, of whom 500 were Korean labourers. Against relatively weak defences, the 27th Infantry Division suffered heavily, sustaining 218 casualties, but had they invaded the more formidable Nauru atoll, the cost in lives would have been considerably higher.

Nauru became increasingly isolated as American naval and air activity intensified. Faced with a situation of overcrowding, 1,200 Nauruans were shipped by the Japanese to the Caroline Islands. Food shortages plagued those remaining, and over 300 Japanese were to die from starvation, some Imperial soldiers resorting to cannibalism for survival. Additional atrocities committed by the Japanese during their occupation included the execution of five Europeans and over 50 natives.

The capitulation of Germany in May 1945 brought about renewed demands on behalf of Australia and New Zealand for the invasion of Nauru and the immediate resumption of phosphate mining. However, the British authorities were unwilling to risk lives when, in time, they viewed the isolated Japanese garrison falling victim to starvation. American interests were also focused elsewhere with the forthcoming invasion of Japan, until the dropping of the atomic bomb led to the unconditional surrender of the Emperor's forces.



By far the most-powerful type of gun on Nauru were ten 6-inch naval guns, one of which is here seen being inspected by members of the Australian 31/51st Infantry Battalion on September 14, 1945, after they took over the island.



These quick-firing, breech-loading guns had been built by the British firm of Sir William Armstrong Whitworth & Co. Ltd for the Japanese Navy before the First World War. Although the

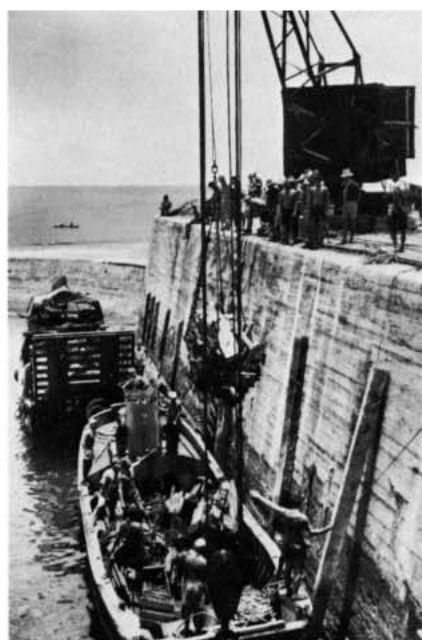


batteries themselves have long since been dismantled, surprisingly enough, several of the 6-inch barrels still survive on the island today, like these two at Anebore Bay dated 1911.



In the end, all the Japanese efforts to make Nauru into an island fortress were completely wasted. Planning their island-hopping campaign, and studying the Nauru defences, the V Amphibious Corps issued an estimate for the invasion which 'envisaged considerable difficulty in the capture of Nauru.' It was estimated that at least one division would be needed 'to seize the rocky, cave-riddled Nauru'. Admiral Spruance, Nimitz's Chief-of-Staff and later the commander of the US Fifth Fleet, recalled afterwards: 'The more we studied the details of capturing Nauru, the tougher the operation appeared to be,

and finally it seemed doubtful the troops assigned for it could take it. The transports available for trooplift were the limiting factor. On the other hand, Makin was an entirely suitable objective, and its capture was well within our capabilities'. So a decision was reached to bypass and isolate Nauru. However, the Japanese garrison held out till the final capitulation of the Empire in August 1945. Only on September 13 did HMAS *Diamantina* arrive to arrange for its surrender. Here, Australian and Japanese officers confer aboard the *Diamantina* prior to signing the instrument of surrender. (AWM)



Troops of the 31/51st Battalion unloading supplies at the British Phosphate Commission wharf the day after the surrender. Today, phosphate supplies on Nauru are forecast to become exhausted before the next decade, and the government of Nauru (an independent republic since 1968) is seeking alternative forms of revenue by investing heavily in countries such as Australia. (AWM)

Although Nauru lay within the American Pacific Fleet area, the US Chiefs-of-Staff agreed to the proposal that Nauru and Ocean Island surrender to Australian military forces. HMAS *Diamantina* was dispatched, reaching Nauru on the morning of September 13, 1945. At 2.45 p.m. that afternoon, the Japanese surrender party of Captain Hisayuki Soeda and five other naval officers boarded the *Diamantina*. Presenting his sword to Brigadier J. R. Stevenson, commander of the Australian 11th Infantry Brigade, Soeda signed the formal instrument of surrender.

The Japanese garrison at the time of the surrender consisted of the 67 Naval Guard Unit and the Yokusuka Special No. 2 Naval Landing Party. Soeda's Nauru occupation force, under the command of the Japanese Fourth Fleet at Truk, comprised three battalions plus other units totalling 2,681 men. Also stationed on the island were 541 Koreans and 513 Japanese civilians attached to labour and construction units. After the surrender, Japanese soldiers on Nauru were transferred to Torokina on Bougainville before repatriation to Japan.

Below: A curious relic found by the Australians was this American 75mm cannon. It was salvaged from the wreckage of a B-25G, the *Coral Princess* of the US 41st Bomb Group based on Makin, which crashed on Nauru on June 29, 1944, after being hit by Japanese 127mm flak while on a bombing mission with 11 other Mitchells.





Above: Japanese POWs being transported to waiting naval transports for the journey to Bougainville before repatriation to Japan. **Right:** The lack of any sheltered deep-water harbour in Nauru means that all shipping cargo must be loaded onto barges and shuttled ashore, and vice versa, which is as much a problem today as it was 50 years ago.

Half a century later, relics from the Japanese occupation can still be found on the island. Concrete pillboxes continue to encircle Nauru, while rusting artillery pieces deteriorate in the humid environment. Trenches and barbed-wire entanglements designed to repel Allied invaders are today falling victim to the elements, whilst the former air base has been enlarged to allow operations by the jet aircraft of Air Nauru. Yet it is hoped that at least something of the rich wartime history of Nauru can be preserved before it too, like the island's phosphate deposits, disappears.



Although Nauru airport has recently been enlarged by bulldozing debris of the Japanese airbase into the sea, still other

relics remain. Left: A bent propeller from an aircraft that crash-landed on the beach. **Right:** A gun barrel retrieved from the sea.

Eighty-six years ago, at 136 Commercial Street (right) in the small Welsh mining village of Aberbargoed, a baby was born to Thomas Michael and Sarah Ann Chadwick. Little could they know that 34 years later their son, Glyndwr, would perform a unique service for Britain, albeit unknowingly, for by then he would be dead with a false identity, known only as 'The Man Who Never Was'. The Second World War's best kept secret was finally revealed in November 1995, when former top secret files were released for inspection at the Public Record Office. Roger Morgan, who has spent ten years trying to establish the identity of 'Major Martin' (see *After the Battle* Nos. 54 and 64) could not believe his eyes while ploughing through a new batch of MI5 files, including ADM 223/794 — a three-volume report of all Commander Ewan Montagu's wartime operations. There, at the end of the last volume, staring out at him, was the answer to many sleepless nights: Glyndwr Michael.



THE SECOND WORLD WAR'S BEST KEPT SECRET REVEALED

By Roger Morgan

In *After the Battle* No. 54 published in 1986, I ended the account of my unsuccessful quest for the identity of the 'Mincemeat' corpse with the words: 'in 2043 — by which time the Cabinet Office file will hopefully be transferred to the Public Record Office. I will be 96, and God willing will be waiting at the door.'

Thankfully, at 48, courtesy of John Major's 1994 Open Government Initiative, my wait is over. PRO file ADM 223/794 'Naval Deception', written by Commander Ewan Montagu, was declassified in censored form on November 22, 1995. It contains, inter-alia, the definitive account of *The Man Who Never Was*, including the name of the corpse used.

Glyndwr Michael appears to have been an insane tramp, the illegitimate offspring of illiterate South Wales mining stock, who committed suicide at the age of 34 in January 1943 by eating phosphorus rat poison. Montagu is thus shown to have lied about both his date and cause of death, in a successful attempt to prevent his identification.

As one always suspected, the grave in Huelva of 'Major William Martin, son of John Glyndwr Martin and Antonia Martin of Cardiff', is now seen to offer substantial clues. Martin instead of Michael, both boy's Christian names used as surnames, Glyndwr, An(tonia) = (Sarah) Ann, and Cardiff.

His birth certificate shows him being born at 136 Commercial Street, Aberbargoed to Thomas Michael, a colliery haulier, and Sarah Ann Chadwick, on January 4, 1909. Sarah signed with a cross, showing she was illiterate. Aber(Upper)bargoed and Bargoed are South Wales 'valley' mining communities about halfway between Merthyr Tydfil and Caerphilly dominated by the spoil heap of Bargoed Pit. Almost three years later, when his sister Doris was born, the family had moved to 7 Garth Street, Taff's Well, about 11 miles south next to Rockwood Pit. On Doris's birth certificate Sarah is described as 'late Cotterell, formerly Chadwick'.

Glyndwr's death certificate shows that he died on Thursday, January 28, 1943 at St Pancras Hospital, which adjoins Bentley Purchase's Coroner's Court and Mortuary. He is described as a labourer of no fixed abode, dying of phosphorus rat poison, self-administered whilst of unsound mind, this being determined at an inquest held on February 4, 1943. The only further documentation is the entry in Purchases's Mortuary Register, No. 35 of February 1943: 'Michael, Glyndwr; 34; Phosphorus Poisoning; Suicide; Lunatic; Cost of Proceedings £1'. The low cost implies

no post-mortem was performed, thus Purchase was probably already on the look out for a suitable corpse. 'Lunatic' is thought to mean that he was certified insane and undergoing treatment in an asylum. St Pancras Hospital had a Lunacy Assessment Unit at this time, although its records do not survive. According to author Alan Stripp, Sir David Hunt added the detail that he had been found in a London warehouse, where he had presumably been sleeping rough. The inquest is not reported in the local papers. Glyndwr did not leave a will.

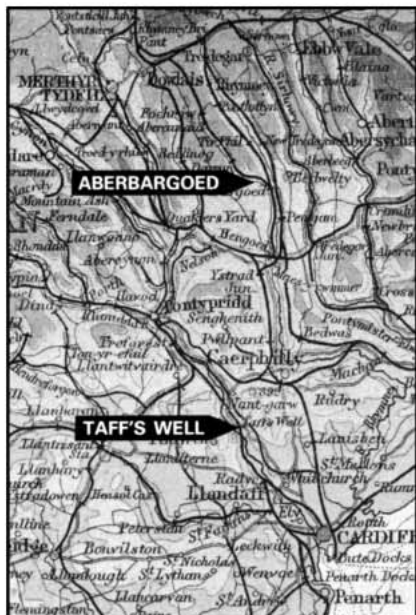
In a footnote in *The Double Cross System* (see *After the Battle* No. 11), Sir John Masterman gives the minutes of the XX Committee meeting one week after the death on February 4, at which 'Mincemeat'

was discussed; as it now transpires the very day of the Inquest: 'Plan MINCEMEAT. This plan is the same as TROJAN HORSE. The details of the plan were put forward by Commander Montagu and F/Lt Cholmondeley. It was reported that a body had been procured and it was explained that this would have to be used within three months.'

This telescopes the time scale implied by Montagu in his book enormously — Churchill gave his consent on April 15, and Glyndwr started his journey from Hackney Mortuary on April 17. He had therefore only been on ice 11 weeks, much more feasible than the six months implied by Montagu, but still on the

The story so far . . .

- 1942 Flight Lieutenant Charles Cholmondeley, and Lieutenant Commander Ewan Montagu propose a strategic deception to 'plant' a corpse carrying false papers to mislead the Germans as to Allied plans in the Mediterranean. Code-name 'Trojan Horse' later changed to 'Mincemeat'.
- 1943
- January 28 A suicide in London by a 34-year-old provides a suitable corpse.
- February 4 Inquest confirms death by phosphorous poisoning. Body expropriated by Coroner Bentley Purchase for use by MI5. The same day, the XX Committee was informed that a suitable corpse had been obtained. Plan approved for implementation with the false identity of 'Major Martin'.
- April 17 Body placed in special container packed with dry ice and driven from Hackney Mortuary to Holy Loch, Scotland.
- April 28 Container loaded aboard submarine HMS *Seraph* which departs for Spain.
- April 30 Body carrying misleading documents released into sea and washes up on Spanish coast near Huelva.
- May 1 'Major Martin' buried in the local cemetery.
- July 10 Success of Allied landing in Sicily partly attributed to deception plans.
- 1953 Publication of *The Man Who Never Was* by Ewan Montagu — the first semi-official revelation of Operation 'Mincemeat'.
- 1955 Film released based on the book.
- 1977 Montagu publishes *Beyond Top Secret U* based on secret Admiralty files.
- 1986 *After the Battle* publishes Roger Morgan's investigation titled 'The Man Who Almost Is' in issue 58 speculating on the identity of 'Major Martin'.
- 1988 *The Mail on Sunday* publishes Colin Gibbon's suggested identity of 'Major Martin'.
- 1989 *After the Battle* publish follow-up on the quest to name 'Major Martin'.
- 1995 File ADM 223/794 released at the Public Record Office revealing the true identity.



Once he had the name it was a fairly routine job for Roger to search the records at St Catherine's House to trace Glyndwr's birth and death certificates (although he was somewhat surprised to find that there was another Glyndwr Michael born in Wales the following year, although he died while an infant). In September 1996, Roger motored to Wales to track down Glyndwr's roots. From his birthplace in Aberbargoed, by 1912 the family had moved to 7 Garth Street (above) in Taff's Well near Cardiff.

limit of acceptability. Indeed, reports indicate that the body had deteriorated much more than expected when extracted from the canister on *Seraph's* foredeck.

In an attempt to learn more, I have visited the two birthplaces. Both are typical terraced miners cottages clustering about now non-existent mines — the pit head gear expunged and the spoil heaps landscaped. Door to door enquiries showed the trail had long gone cold, and the electoral rolls produced only one Michael family who denied any connection. The local cemetery proved barren, and the small, long-since-converted chapel graveyard was four feet deep in impenetrable brambles. Local newspaper appeals proved fruitless.

All this is to be expected, of course. 'Martin' had to be a nonentity whom no one would miss.

Why then the secrecy? Montagu said the relatives (not parents, note) insisted on it, and in my original research two people independently said that the reason the family requested complete anonymity was that the person had been insane at the time he died, which, as we have seen, is now confirmed. Insanity then, of course, had considerably more stigma than it does now, as did illegitimacy.

Montagu maintained his vow of silence even after he believed those who could release him were dead — admirable, and no less what one would expect from a Judge, but perhaps a little pedantic. It also has to be considered that the secrecy could have been to conceal that the parents were not consulted at all and the corpse 'stolen'.

It certainly seems that the only opportunity to consult the relatives would have been

at the inquest itself, which they may have attended, before the report to the XX Committee on the same day. Montagu certainly implies that locating and consulting the relatives was a moderately drawn out procedure, but we now know there was only a single week between the death and the inquest to do this. One oddity does strike me about the date on the ID card — Tuesday, February 2, 1943 — bang in the middle of this vital week. It would seem likely this was either the date on which Purchase told Montagu that he had a suitable body, giving only one day to consult the relatives, or it was the day Montagu actually forged the card, in which case everything had been settled before this. In fact, Glyndwr Michael had taken rat poison, containing phosphorus, just two days before he died.

CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF DEATH



GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

Application Number R 005902

REGISTRATION DISTRICT	
1943	DEATH in the Sub-district of <u>South East St Pancras</u> in the <u>Metropolitan Borough of St Pancras</u>

Columns:— 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

No. When and where died Name and surname Sex Age Occupation Cause of death Signature, description and residence of informant When registered Signature of registrar

105	Twenty eight January 1943 St Pancras Hospital	Glyndwr Michael	Male	34	Years a Labourer	He found a bottle of rat poison which he took while in a mental	Phosphorus poisoning but fatal	Received from W. R. Purchase for London January 1943	Found at his home
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CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a Register of Deaths in the District above mentioned.

Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the Seal of the said Office, the 1st day of May 1996

DXZ 338887

See note overleaf

CAUTION:—It is an offence to falsify a certificate or to make or knowingly use a false certificate or a copy of a false certificate intending it to be accepted as genuine to the prejudice of any person or to possess a certificate knowing it to be false without lawful authority.

DL000942 128997 50M 9/95 Mch012191



In Roger's 1986 article, he put forward a possible name and, two years later, Colin Gibbon and James Rusbridger (who committed suicide in 1994 — see *After the Battle* No. 84 page 18) came out with another in a blaze of publicity in *The Mail on Sunday* in December 1988. Roger had speculated whether the death was even registered which, although highly irregular, would have ensured almost total secrecy. As it transpired, Bentley Purchase, the Coroner for the St Pancras District of London in which Glyndwr died, had issued a certificate although Purchase had dispensed with a post-mortem which would have rendered the body useless for the purpose it was intended. *Below:* Although the document states that Glyndwr died at St Stephen's Hospital, Fulham, this does not accord with the death certificate which states that his death occurred at St Pancras Hospital in St Pancras Way (right).



TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET (U) *Appendix behind.*

Once the Africa campaign was completed, the problems of Security and Deception, which have already been discussed in connection with TORCH, assumed a new form. The next target was Sicily. For many reasons it was an obvious target and the difficulty of deceiving the enemy was great.

To solve this problem Operation MINCEMEAT was used. It is a small classic of Deception, brilliantly elaborate in detail, completely successful in operation. Fortunately, Special Intelligence enabled us to know that the enemy was deceived by it. The officer who fathomed it was Lieut. Cdr. Montagu, upon whose detailed narrative (which contains as an appendix photographs of the corpse and of the principal items of his luggage) the present narrative is based.

Shortly before the launching of TORCH, a Catalina had crashed off Spain. A body had been washed ashore and we know that the papers on the body had reached the Germans. This suggested that the Spanish could be relied on to pass on what they found, and that this unneutral habit might be turned to account. On 5th November, 1942, Flight-Lieut. Cholmondeley brought up for consideration by the Twenty Committee a plan (called TRQJAN HORSE) for planting deceptive documents on the enemy by dropping a corpse from an aircraft. From this beginning Montagu devised Operation MINCEMEAT. Sir Bernard Spilsbury was consulted on the subject of corpses. He advised that if the body of a man who had died from suitable causes were washed ashore in Spain, no one could tell, without elaborate post mortem, that he had not died in an air-crash. Spaniards were bad pathologists; as Roman Catholics they had a dislike of post mortems, and thus far Montagu's way was clear. He went next to a coroner. Mr. Bentley Purchase was amenable and agreed to keep a suitable corpse on a refrigerator until it was required. By 2nd February, 1943, Montagu's plan was complete in rough outline and the I.S.S.B. codeword MINCEMEAT was appropriated to it so that signals might be made concerning it.

On 28th January there had died at St. Stephen's Hospital, Fulham, a labourer of no fixed abode. His name was Glyndwr Michael and he was 34 years of age. Two days earlier he had taken phosphorous rat-poison, which was unlikely to reveal itself to post-mortem examination, except possibly by faint traces in the liver. Mr. Bentley Purchase dispensed with a post-mortem, notified the registrar that the body was being "removed out of England" for burial, but in fact kept it in St. Pancras Mortuary until 1st April, when it was removed to Hackney and dressed in the underclothes provided. On 3rd April, Montagu and Cholmondeley completed the dressing except for the Mae West, boots and gaiters which the supposed staff-officer was to wear. In this they were assisted by the Coroner and the mortuary keeper. No one else saw the body dressed, and the mortuary keeper did not know for what purpose it was to be used.

The exact form of the document to be planted on the enemy needed careful devising. A low level document - e.g. a letter from a member of the Planning Staff in London to a member of the Planning Staff in Algiers - would not carry enough weight. Montagu was determined that his plan should not be weakened in this way. He drafted a letter to be written by the V.C.I.G.S. to General Alexander, basing it on three main principles:-

- (i) That the planted target should be casually but definitely identified.
- (ii) That two other places should be identified as cover, that one of them should be Sicily itself and the other thrown in so that, if the Germans grasped that the document was a plant, Sicily should not be pin-pointed.

/(iii)

According to the pathologist, Sir Bernard Spilsbury, (and the leading textbook of the period *Forensic Medicine* by Sidney Smith, published in 1940) death by phosphorus poisoning would be difficult to detect. However, Keith Simpson's book of the same name published in 1951 would appear to state a contrary view — a rather confusing state of affairs.

It is clear that the British Government itself is not now particular about the name being known, and probably never was, as the only name censored from the 'Mincemeat' file by the weeders is Jock Horsfall's, the MI5 driver of the van which transported the body — a name which Montagu published in 1953 as Horsfall was dead. This shows the absurdity of weeding by fixed rules without any knowledge of the subject.

The file itself is the last in a compilation of 55 similar files making up the third hand-bound volume (strawboard covers crudely covered with reversed Admiralty Charts) of a set dealing with the work of the Naval Intelligence Department Section 12, headed by Montagu from February 1943. As these are not official covers, they lack any of the normal red security labelling — as Montagu put it in his book based upon them in 1977 ('some memoranda which, in very special circumstances and for a very particular reason, I was allowed to keep'), they are 'Beyond TOP SECRET (U)', a security classification he claims to have devised. His account of 'Mincemeat' adds some interesting minor details not previously known. For example, three identity cards with different photographs were produced and Commander Jewell of the *Seraph*, just before he launched Glyndwr, tucked the one that looked most like him into his tunic. More puzzlingly, the hospital in which Glyndwr died is given as St Stephen's in Fulham Road but this must be an error for such a death would not be within the remit of Purchase as Coroner for St Pancras.

What then of Glyndwr Michael? The gravestone in Huelva (see cover of *After the Battle* No. 54) contains a convenient blank panel at the base, as though deliberately left by Montagu so that one day 'when the facts can be told' Major William Martin can be given his true name. That day has come. I intend to press the Commonwealth War Graves Commission to add the following inscription:

'The Man Who Never Was'

Glyndwr Michael

Born 4th February 1909
Died 28th January 1943
Son of Thomas Michael
and Sarah Ann Chadwick
of South Wales

He served his country unwittingly but well



After a brief spell in the Belgian Army, Jean Noizet, aged 20, joined the 3e Régiment d'Aéronautique as a pupil observer in 1936. He began flying training in August that year, gaining his Wings in October 1937. He is pictured here beside a Fairey Fox, whilst serving with 7 Escadrille III Groupe 3 Régiment at Evere.



When Belgium was overrun in May 1940, he escaped to French-held North Africa where the Belgian School of Piloting regrouped in Morocco. Although ordered to surrender according to the terms of the Armistice, Noizet was one of the many Belgians who made their way to Britain to continue the fight.

BELGIAN SPITFIRE PILOT HONoured

By Michael Davies

On August 2, 1943, a young Belgian, Pilot Officer Jean Noizet, arrived at RAF Rednal, in Shropshire, to brush up on his fighter pilot skills. Although he was a pre-war flying instructor with approximately 700 hours to his credit, all his experience had been undertaken on antiquated biplanes with the Belgian Air Force. Consequently, he was posted to No. 61 Operational Training Unit as part of his refresher course.

On August 6, Jean Noizet made his first flight in a Spitfire, Spitfire IIA P7304. Many pilots have written accounts of their first Spitfire flights and every one of them stand as testimony to the sheer excitement and thrill they felt on flying this superb aeroplane. They were all of the same opinion; the Spitfire was a dream to fly.

At Rednal, Jean Noizet undertook ground instruction on various aeronautical subjects, and was also building up experience and hours on the Spitfire, involving such exercises as sector recce, cross-country, high climb to 30,000 ft, instrument flying, low flying, formation flying, bomber affiliation and dogfight practice.

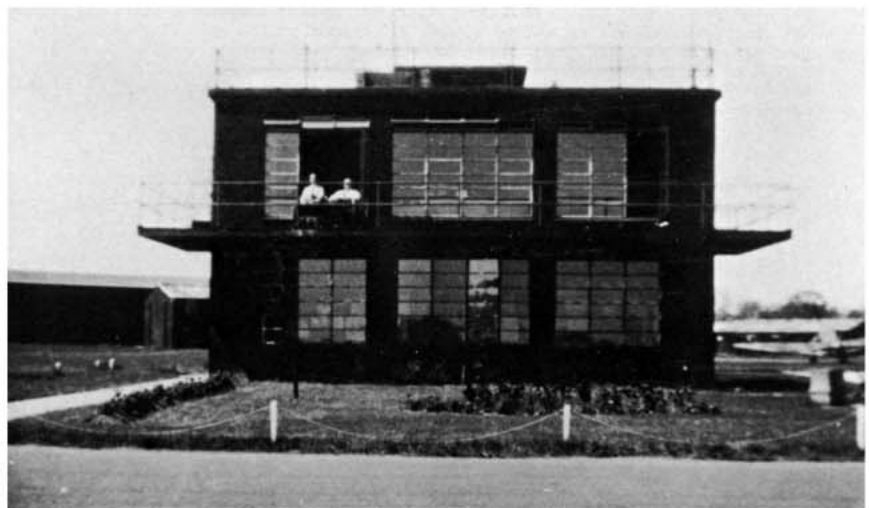
At approximately 4.35 p.m. on Sunday, August 22, Jean Noizet and his friend, fellow Belgian Henri Maurice Goldsmid, took off from Rednal in Spitfire IIA P7304 coded TO-Z, and Spitfire IIA P7444 coded TO-R, respectively. It was a fine summer afternoon

and the two pilots had been detailed to practice attacks and dogfighting for a period of one hour. The attacks were to last 40 minutes and the remaining 20 minutes were to be spent in dogfighting. The first part of the exercise proceeded without mishap and the pilots began the practice dogfight. However, the mock battle was destined to become a tragic accident.

A local farm worker, Tom Butters, was living on the edge of Hincks Plantation near Lilleshall, Shropshire, at the time and he clearly recalls the events which followed.

'My wife and I stood outside our farm

cottage on a summer Sunday afternoon and watched the two planes performing mock dogfights above the woods. They seemed to be fooling about, then something suddenly happened. I think they must have touched. One plummeted down into the woods in a steep dive, and the other went further over veering towards Kynnersley. Stretcher bearers went down the field to the crash scene and looked at the wreckage, but they came back not long after and said it was hopeless.'



He enlisted in the RAF in 1943 and, after undertaking a refresher course at RAF Cranwell, he was posted first to No. 5 (P) AFU at Tern Hill and Tatenhill (Staffs), then to No. 61 Operational Training Unit based at RAF Rednal (right) in Shropshire.



No. 61 OTU had moved to Rednal from Heston in April 1942, being equipped with Spitfire IIs and Vs. (IWM)

In an instant Jean Noizet was dead; a man who had escaped from Belgium and travelled to Great Britain, via France, North Africa, Casablanca and Gibraltar. Eventually he had arrived in Scotland; travelling to London, Lincoln and finally to Shropshire. He had come to England so that he might continue the fight for the freedom of his homeland, and ultimately one day return to Belgium. To die in England, so far from achieving that aim, was a sad irony.

The official report into the accident concluded that both pilots made an error of judgement in the converging speed of the head-on attack; the situation made worse by the lack of forward vision from the cockpit of a Spitfire. A disregard of personal danger was shown by Jean and Henri due to their excessive keenness.

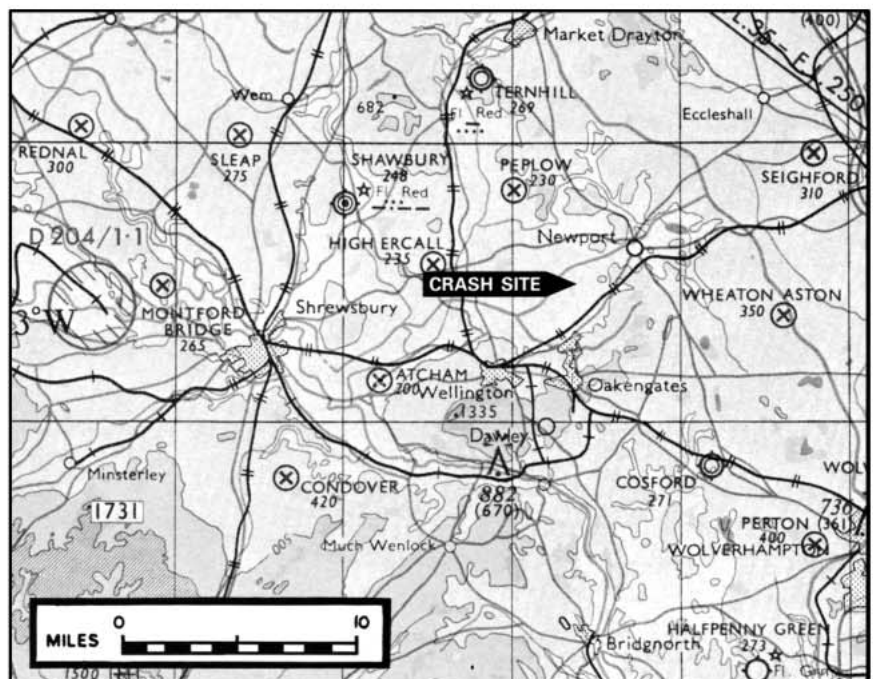
On realising that the aeroplanes were approaching rapidly, both pilots turned to starboard in order to avoid collision, but it was too late. The aeroplanes were so close their port wings struck. After temporarily losing control, Goldsmit was able to force-land safely at Halfpenny Green airfield. Noizet was less fortunate. His plane, having lost part of its port wing, went into a steep dive and crashed into Hincks Plantation.

(Goldsmit was destined also to lose his life just over a year later whilst on operations with No. 349 (Belgian) Squadron. On November 2, 1944, the squadron had arrived at Maldegem (Airfield B-65) in Belgium. Next day, Henri was killed during a mission over the Moerdijk area (south of Rotterdam) near Lochtenburg in the Netherlands when he was hit by flak and brought down. He was buried on July 6, 1945, at the General Cemetery in Dordrecht and transferred to Evere Cemetery in Belgium in August 1950.)

Both pilots were relatively inexperienced on the type: Jean Noizet had 110 hours in his RAF logbook, but only 12 were on the Spitfire. Although head-on attacks were prohibited as far as possible because of the inability of inexperienced pilots to judge approach speeds, it appears that while carrying out just such a manoeuvre, between High Erroll and Halfpenny Green, the aircraft collided. Pilot Officer Goldsmit managed to land his machine at RAF Halfpenny Green but Jean Noizet's Spitfire, having lost part of its port wing, dived into the ground west of the little village of Lilleshall, some 2½ miles south-west of Newport.

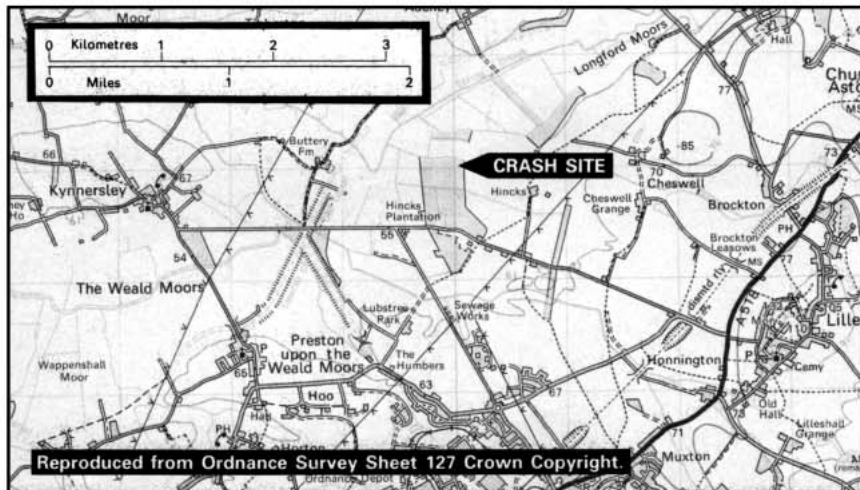


On August 22, 1943, just over three months after he first began flying in Britain, Pilot Officer Jean Noizet (pictured left before receiving his Royal Air Force Wings) and Pilot Officer Henri Goldsmit (right) took off from Rednal in a pair of Spitfires to practice dogfighting. (Defence Ministry Belgium/Brussels Air Museum)



SPITFIRE RECOVERY

It was the search for a crashed Vickers Wellington bomber that led two members of the Wartime Aircraft Recovery Group (WARG), Don Matthews and Ron Heath, to the Newport area of Shropshire. The date was Sunday, September 11, 1977. It was rumoured that the crashed aeroplane lay submerged in a peat bog near Edgmond, but information on the subject was vague and, in the event, all efforts to locate the aeroplane were unsuccessful. However, although the search for the Wellington bomber ceased, it became clear from information provided by a local resident that a fighter aircraft had also crashed in the vicinity during the Second World War and the recovery group were directed to a local wood known as Hincks Plantation. After so many years, all that existed above ground at the site of the supposed crash was a depression on top of which had been piled branches and household rubbish. However, when these obstruc-



The aircraft came down in a small wood along the Lilleshall to Kynnersley road known as Hincks Plantation and it was here, 34 years later, in September 1977, that the Wartime Aircraft Recovery Group, based in the West Midlands, began investigating the site.



Over four consecutive weekends, the group recovered many aircraft parts from what was established as a Spitfire, its identity being confirmed from the painted serial 'P7304' on the head armour. Here Don Matthews (left) and Ron Heath pose with the Merlin engine.

tions were removed, positive evidence came to light indicating that this was indeed the site of a crashed aircraft. Just beneath the surface, a broken section of propeller blade and pieces of charred parachute cord were found but, as it was already late in the afternoon, the group decided to postpone further investigation until the next weekend.

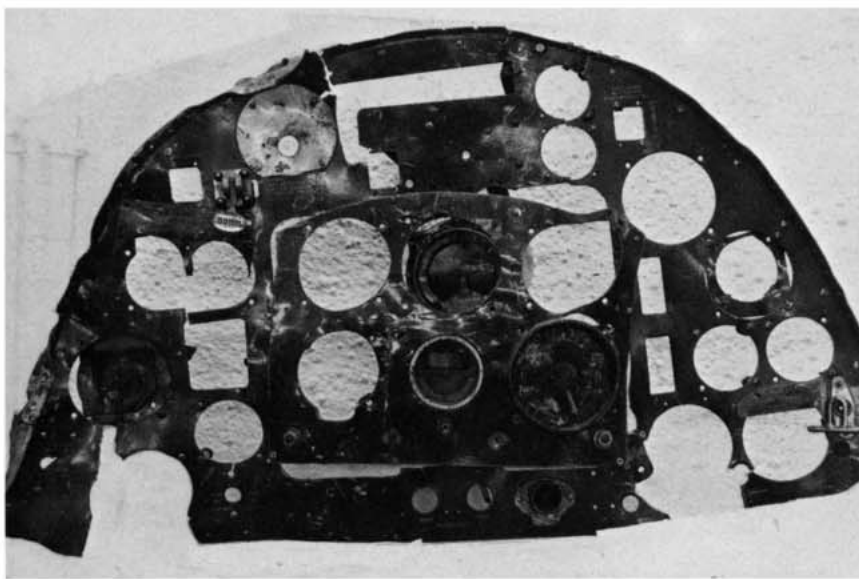
On the following Sunday, extra help having been drafted in, the dig began in earnest at approximately 10 a.m. Aircraft remains were located just 12 inches below the surface and, due to the peaty nature of the soil, they showed very little sign of corrosion. Digging followed the trail of wreckage downwards and sideways indicating the aircraft had struck the ground in a steep (but not vertical) dive. The trail continued approximately five feet underground and it was here that the stringers and formers from the fuselage and wing root joint strongpoints were found; all badly damaged but relatively well preserved. As digging progressed, other items were recovered including the cockpit warning horn, oxygen bottle and radio which had been crushed flat on impact. The dig had taken all day and there was still work to be done; but with the light fading the group were forced to call a halt. Don Matthews

recalls: 'We decided we had better fence off the hole and pack up until the next weekend. Before leaving the site, we back filled the hole, thus sealing it from the air and prying eyes'.

The dig continued over the next two weekends during which time two information plates were found, one stating the size of the wing mounting bolts and the other with the warning: 'This aircraft must not be flown without either guns or tunnel plug fitted'. The nature of the wreckage, and the inspection stamps and parts number (300) confirmed that it was a Spitfire.

Other items found in the wreckage included the instrument panel, gun button, the armoured windscreen; the rear-view mirror, and the remains of the fuel tank.

'Only a small amount of wreckage was left at the bottom of the hole', said Don Matthews, 'so as a last resort the dig was taken further sideways and then another very interesting fact came to light, the engine was found, but not as one would have thought i.e. nose down in the clay, it was in fact standing on its supercharger, facing almost vertical. It appears that the engine had skidded on the clay and forced its way back upwards.'



Left: Also recovered was the plane's instrument panel. Right: One item with particular poignancy was the front armoured windscreen, as the post-crash inquiry had established that one

cause of the collision had been the pilots' limited forward vision or, as the official accident card put it: 'Also inexperience in forward view from Spitfire'.



The Recovery Group were shocked to discover that the pilot's human remains were still in the wreckage. Personal items recovered included a shoe, parachute buckle and goggles (left) and an image of the Virgin Mary (right).

The cockpit area had been reached during the third weekend. It was at this stage that it became apparent that this was not only a crash site but also a grave. The pilot's seat armour had been recovered with the number P7304 painted on, but as soon as the paint was exposed to the atmosphere it began to peel off and very soon it was lost. It was immediately after this that, to everyone's surprise and shock, the heel of a shoe was also discovered in the cockpit area of the aircraft. Don Matthews recalls: 'The petrol fumes in the bottom of the hole were very strong and digging could only take place for a short period at a time, before having to climb out, and sometimes being helped out of the hole. The straps of the pilot's sutton harness which passed through slots in the plate became evident now, but they had broken with the force of the impact. At this stage, the heel of a shoe was seen. After cleaning round it, the shoe was exposed which contained a sock and a piece of bone, this particular find being the first indication we had that this crash still contained human remains.

'After a discussion amongst members of

the dig, it was decided that the authorities were to be informed right away. It was also decided that digging should continue to ascertain if there were any more human remains left in the crash site. The gunsight was recovered together with the pilot's flying helmet, goggles and further human remains. A few inches further down, the peaty soil gave way to clay-type soil. Neat petrol was seeping into the hole making breathing rather difficult but, after just a few minutes digging, more bones came to light'.

Human remains having been found, the police were called in and RAF Shawbury notified. Police Constable Knighton arrived and supervised the removal of the remains by RAF officials. The Coroner for East Shropshire was also notified. The pilot's remains were taken to RAF Shawbury by a group member, Pete Lambe, and placed in a cell in the guard room overnight and then taken to the mortuary where medical staff reconstructed the skeleton. A medical report was prepared outlining the cause of death.

Clues to the identification of the body were found within the pilot's ID card,

stamped with the word 'FOREIGN'. The pilot's prayer book, an image of the Virgin Mary, his address book, a torn and faded book of postage stamps, clothing coupons, soap coupons and a number of National Savings Stamps were found. With these was a spiral bound book containing pencil-written notes; a French to English phrase book; and a piece of an envelope with post-marked stamps sent from Australia. The remains of two letters were also located. One was sent to the pilot from a young lady which, as group member Peter Lambe recalls, 'still contained traces of perfume'. The other was from the pilot to a girl in the ATS Camp at Oswestry in north-west Shropshire. Another piece of paper had the handwritten words 'Florenville 1940' (the pilot's home town) and a makers stamp. This was later discovered to be a manufacturers mark on photographic paper. The pilot's cigarette lighter was also found and a regulation service watch inside one of the pilot's flying gloves. But, perhaps most significantly, his badly torn uniform was recovered with the word 'BELGIUM' on the shoulder flash.



Left: An indication as to the pilot's identity was his ID card marked 'foreign'. Right: Other personal effects included (top row) the pilot's clothing coupons, savings stamps, and soap

coupons; a clothing coupon book (centre); a faded picture marked 'Florenville 1940' on the back, a stamp book, and a piece of envelope with Australian post-marked stamps.



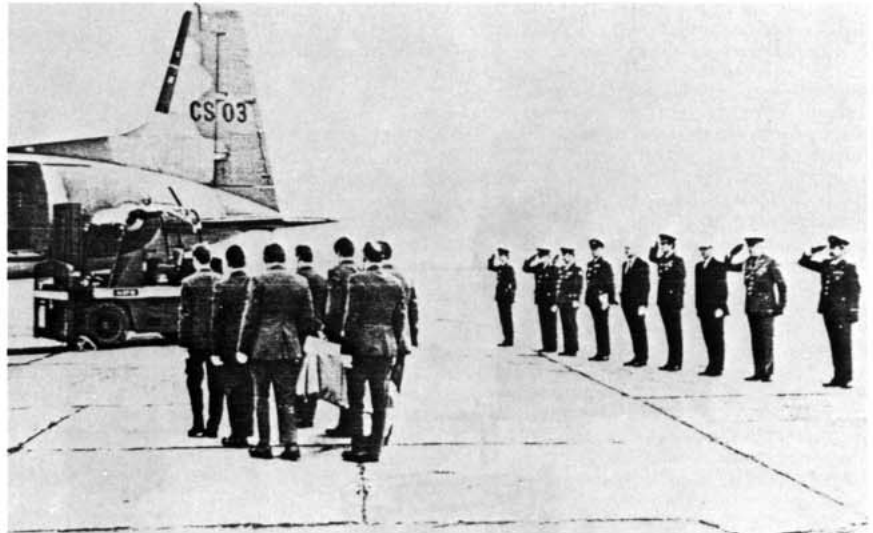
Scant remains appear to have been recovered from the crash site in 1943 because 34 years later the medical staff at RAF Shawbury reconstructed the almost complete skeleton from the bones found by the WARG. Notwithstanding, Jean Noizet had a grave in Plot 26 of Brookwood Military Cemetery in Surrey until 1948, when the Belgian government requested the exhumation of those casualties who were to be repatriated to their homeland. *Left:* The Commonwealth War Graves Commission then relaid Plot 26 into a permanent Belgian section for 45 graves concentrated there from other parts of the United Kingdom. *Right:* Today, Jean Noizet's old grave — No. 7 in Row C — contains the remains of Soldat David Serebriany, killed on November 7, 1943.

BURIED WITH FULL MILITARY HONOURS

The partial remains that had originally been recovered by the RAF in 1943 were buried in Brookwood Military Cemetery in Surrey, but in 1948 the Belgian authorities repatriated them to the military cemetery at Evere in north-eastern Brussels. However, it was only as a direct result of the find in Shropshire in 1977 that the missing links of the story finally emerged.

In November that year, Jean's brother, Paul Noizet, who had been blinded whilst in a German labour camp during the war, was told by his wife Claire about a newspaper article in the pages of the Brussels newspaper *Le Soir*. This described how a Spitfire had been recovered in England by a local aircraft recovery group, the pilot being named as Jean Noizet. Realising that the article concerned Paul's elder brother, Paul, Claire and the Noizet family, with the unstinting help and support of the RAF and Belgian authorities, immediately 'undertook all the difficult processes of repatriating the glorious remains of Jean'.

The remains were transferred to Belgium on March 10, 1978, and on the 15th, they were buried in the grave at Evere with full military honours with members of his family in attendance.

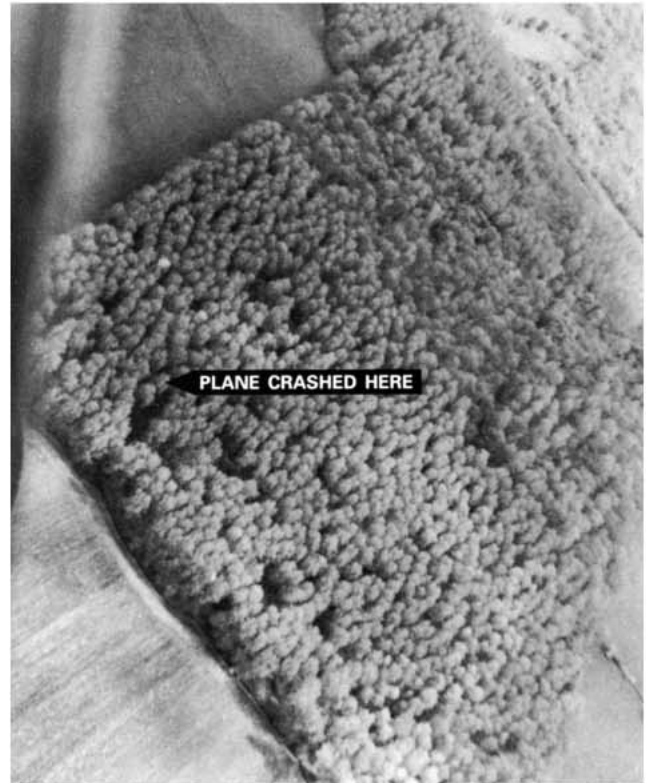


Above: On March 10, 1978, the further remains of Pilot Officer Noizet uncovered in Hincks Plantation were flown to Belgium to be interred with those buried 30 years previously. *Below:* Five days after they had arrived from Britain, Jean Noizet's remains were buried with full military honours in the Pelouse d'Honneur at the Cemetery of Brussels at Evere, with members of the family in attendance.





Left: Memorial flight sequel. On August 21, 1995, 52 years after the fatal dogfight, our author Michael Davies (left, pictured with his co-author, Jill Rogers) took to the air from Rednal airfield in a de Havilland Tiger Moth, piloted by Steve Eisenstein (right). **Right:** They retraced Jean Noizet's final, fatal flight and made a low pass over the crash position in Hincks Plantation.



SPIRIT PRESERVATION

The remains of Spitfire P7304 were eventually prepared by the Wartime Aircraft Recovery Group for display at the Aerospace Museum at Cosford, although the pilot concerned was not named. When I saw the display during a visit to the museum in 1986 there was no mention of the pilot's name, which saddened me greatly, and I simply felt compelled to find out who he was, in order that his sacrifice would not be forgotten. Being a student at the time, I had absolutely no idea where to start researching the life of a WW2 airman. In retrospect, this sounds odd, but to give some indication of how little I knew about research: not only was I unaware of the address of the Ministry of Defence, I did not even know that one was actually *allowed* to contact such an establishment!

I began my enquiries by contacting Don Matthews, of the WARG, to enquire if he was aware of the pilot's name. Unfortunately, Don informed me that no research was undertaken at the time as the Group were requested by the Ministry of Defence to keep the find to themselves, out of respect for the pilot's relatives. Therefore, Don says that 'we were then honour-bound to keep it low-key, so we left everything in the hands of the authorities as we were requested'. However, Don informed me that the pilot's ID card was virtually illegible, but the pilot's name appeared similar to that of *Jon Noirel*. It took me a year to establish the name of the pilot as I had quoted the name *Jon Noirel* in correspondence. Eventually, my research led me to the MoD and further enquiries proved somewhat more successful. The ministry kindly provided me with the pilot's correct name and also advised me to write to the Belgian Embassy in London, and they in turn told me to contact the Burgomaster of Florenville, Jean's home town. The Belgian Ministry of Defence supplied information concerning Pilot Officer Jean Noizet and, although I did not know it at the time, the Burgomaster had meanwhile contacted the Noizet family and informed them of the interest being taken in their relative. By this time, my interest in Jean Noizet's life had intensified and I frequently sensed the sadness associated with Jean's final flight.

Soon after the 44th anniversary of his death, I was contacted by Jean's relatives, offering their encouragement, enthusiasm and gratitude. After further correspondence, Jean's brother Paul wrote saying 'My door is always open to the young brother I have found in you'. When I sent flowers to Jean's grave on the anniversary of his death with the message: 'To my unknown friend', Jean's sister Nelly was moved to tears of joy.



Jean Noizet's nephew and niece Etienne and Marie-Alice Noizet, visited the Aerospace Museum in July 1988 with the intention of viewing the remains of Jean's Spitfire. They also visited Rednal where they walked across the airfield where Jean had last been based, exploring the control tower with mixed feelings. But their greatest pleasure came from seeing and touching the artefacts which had been recovered from the wreck. It was arranged for Jean's shoulder flash to be given to his sister Nelly and his cigarette lighter to his brother Paul.

Paul replied expressing his sincere gratitude for all that had been done by everyone concerned. 'We thank you heartily for the mementoes sent over with our children, which have become for all of us very moving, very evocative; which touch so profoundly, so intimately, our dear and unforgettable Jean.' Paul remembers his big brother always having a cigarette in his hand and felt that the lighter was the greatest gift he could have been given.

Eventually, with the invaluable help and support of Jill Rogers, we presented the results of the research to John Francis, the manager of the Aerospace Museum, who kindly agreed to upgrade the exhibition in keeping with the high quality of the other displays at the museum. It now stands as a fitting tribute to the young pilot who lost his life so far from his home, and who lay undiscovered in a Shropshire Wood for 33 years. In the words of Recovery Group member Don Matthews: 'I felt that it was such a shame for the pilot's sake, the poor chap had been there since the war. Now at last he would be given a funeral befitting that of a fallen airman. An unmarked depression in the ground is no fit place for a brave man. He deserved better... believe me, he deserved better than that.'

MEMORIAL FLIGHT SEQUEL

On Monday, August 21, 1995, a memorial flight was scheduled, in honour of Jean Noizet. The date was chosen to be as near as possible to that of Jean's last flight. At approximately 12.25 p.m. on that summer afternoon, Dr Steve Eisenstein, the owner and pilot of de Havilland Tiger Moth coded G-BMPY, and I took off from Rednal to trace the route that Jean Noizet's Spitfire had taken 52 years earlier. The Tiger Moth then made a number of passes over the crash site at Hincks Plantation in honour of the fallen airman.

Michael Davies and Jill Rogers, are co-authors of the forthcoming book The Limitless Horizon — the biography of Jean Noizet — containing first-hand experiences of many Belgian and other exiles who joined the RAF in the Second World War.



THE DESERT RATS AT GHENT

PROLOGUE

On August 26, 1944, General Bernard L. Montgomery, commander of the British 21st Army Group, issued his orders for the advance north of the Seine. His directives were very clear: 'The proper tactics now are for strong armoured and mobile columns to bypass enemy centres of resistance and push boldly ahead, creating alarm and despondency in enemy rear areas. Enemy centres of resistance thus bypassed should be dealt with by infantry columns coming on later. I rely on commanders of every rank and grade to "drive" ahead with the utmost energy; any tendency to be "sticky" or cautious must be stamped on ruthlessly.'

Amongst the advancing troops was the famous and most experienced armoured division of the British Army: the 7th Armoured Division, the famed 'Desert Rats'. They had been the first formation to go into the Western Desert at the outbreak of war with Italy and it was in the desert that their reputation was made and the Jerboa was adopted as their divisional sign. After the surrender of the German and Italian forces in North Africa, the division was sent to Italy and it was withdrawn from the Mediterranean at the end of December 1943 and brought back to Britain to participate in the invasion of Europe.

The division docked in Scotland on January 7, 1944. Units were sent to their holding areas where they were re-equipped, the tank battalions being issued with the Cromwell (to their horror) and Sherman Fireflies in the ratio of one to four. Reinforcements joined the division but the experienced Desert Rats were retained (against their will) to form the backbone of the reorganised 7th Armoured Division. As Major Kenneth Macksey writes in his *History of the Royal Armoured Corps, 1914-1975*: 'Men who had borne the brunt of the fighting, in some instances since the summer of 1940, complained that surely it was some-

body else's turn. A breakdown in discipline was only averted, in a few instances in such formations as 7th Armoured Division and 4th and 8th Armoured Brigades, by firm leadership.'

The division landed in Normandy on D+1. On August 29, the 7th Armoured Division was transferred to XII Corps (Lieutenant-General Neil M. Ritchie), and on the following afternoon, Major-General Gerald L. Verney (the new divisional commander since August 4) held a conference in the Château

By Jean-Paul Marchal

d'Ecrauville, near Le Neubourg, south of the River Seine, and gave out the orders for the next stage of the advance. A gasp went round the big dining-room when he announced: 'Gentlemen, our next objective is GHENT!' for the 22nd Armoured Brigade was by now less than two-thirds of its strength in tanks and the average shortfall in each infantry battalion was ten officers and 200 men.



In the late afternoon of September 4, 1944, the 7th Armoured Division, the famed 'Desert Rats', after a 200-mile dash across northern France and into Belgium, were approaching the historic city of Ghent. Leading 'Ghent Force', as the mobile spearhead of the division was called, were the *recce* troops of the 11th Hussars. Top: Here, a Daimler armoured car of the 'Cherry-pickers' has reached Oudenaarde. The picture was taken on September 5. Ghent is now only 18 miles away. Above: Our author, Jean-Paul Marchal, and his photographer friend, Norbert Masson, had some difficulty in matching this shot taken on Oudenaarde's Tacambarplein as the square is now used as a parking area.

On the morning before the advance was due to start, Lieutenant-General Miles C. Dempsey, commanding the British 2nd Army, had offered to replace the infantry (131st Infantry Brigade, composed of battalions of the Queens Royal Regiment) with a brigade from the 59th Division, but Verney told him that he preferred to retain the officers and the men who had served so long with the 7th Armoured, and thus were very familiar with their armoured and supporting arms, rather than try to absorb an entirely new formation unaccustomed to the workings of an armoured division at the last moment.

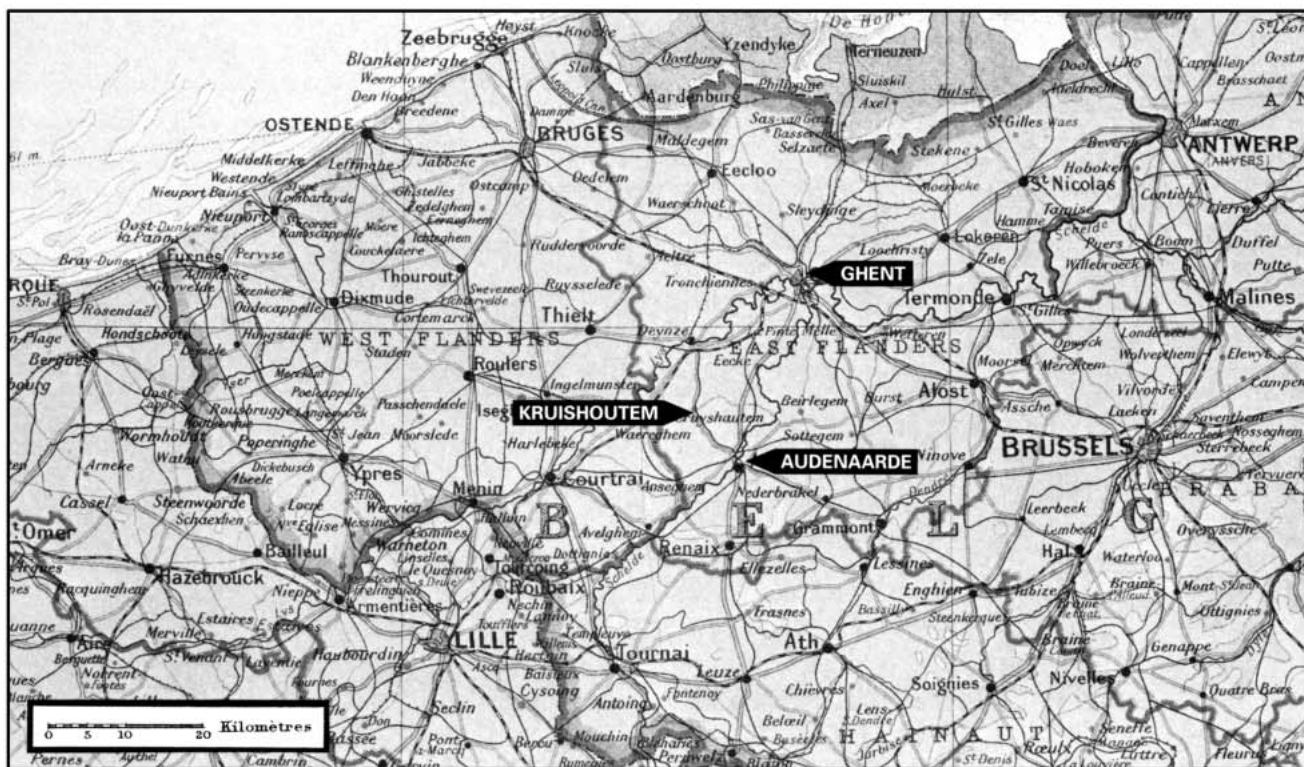
Five days later, September 4, the division had reached Lens where it received fresh orders from General Verney to prepare immediately for a dash to Ghent. Fuel consumption had been exceeding 70,000 gallons a day and so it was out of the question to move more than a composite brigade. The task force for the last 70-mile dash was to be called the 'Ghent Force'. This was made up of a reduced main divisional headquarters; the 11th Hussars; the main headquarters 22nd Armoured Brigade with 5th Battalion Royal Tank Regiment; the 5th Battalion Royal Inniskilling Dragoon Guards; A Coy, 1st Battalion Rifle Brigade; the 5th Regiment Royal Horse Artillery; and the 1/6th Battalion The Queen's Royal Regiment. This Queens battalion was transferred to the Ghent Force from the 131st Infantry Brigade for the operation. There were also extra petrol lorries of the 8th Hussars, the 1st Royal Tank Regiment and the 1st Rifle Brigade to 'reinforce' the echelons of the Ghent Force.

At 1530 hours, the advance on Ghent was resumed. The route ran through Carvin, Seclin, Lesquin, Hem, Toufflers (Belgian frontier), Pecq, Avelgem. By last light, the leading tanks harboured at Kerkhove (near Oudenaarde). The following morning (September 5), the Ghent Force was again on the move driving in a north-easterly direction via Oudenaarde, Kruishoutem, Nazareth and Eke to Zwijnaarde. Part of the force diverged eastward to Melle and Wetteren.

The shot of Crickmay and his car was taken in front of Kruishoutem's town hall.



A few hours later, Ghent Force was at Kruishoutem, north-west of Oudenaarde and six miles closer to Ghent. Following in the tracks of the 11th Hussars was C Squadron of the 5th Royal Tanks. Here, the squadron CO, Major Arthur Crickmay, watches his tanks drive through from his Humber scout car.





NEGOTIATIONS

On Tuesday, September 5, 12 Troop, C Squadron, of the 5th Royal Tank Regiment, drove into the outskirts of Ghent. The troop commander, Lieutenant Ronald Morgan, stopped his three tanks (the fourth of the troop had dropped out with mechanical problems) in the Galglaan, near the intersection with the De Pintelaan at about 1430 hours. Dozens of civilians swarmed around the tanks. A local English-speaking civilian, Alexis Janssens, detached himself from the crowd and introduced himself to Lieutenant Morgan and told him that his position was extremely dangerous as there were several German outposts nearby. Morgan then ordered the troop's 76.2 mm Sherman Firefly of Sergeant Leonard Watkins to stay near the crossroads of Galglaan and De Pintelaan while the Cromwell of Corporal Colin Calas drove further on along the Galglaan to halt a few yards from the T-junction with the Krijgsiaan. Meanwhile, Lieutenant Morgan parked his own Cromwell between the two tanks.

Mr Janssens then suggested that he approach the German position located at the railway viaduct as a mediator to try to effect a surrender. The viaduct was actually out of sight as it stood on the Krijgsiaan, some 600 yards away beyond the right-hand corner of the Galglaan. Morgan hesitated but agreed in the end and he instructed Sergeant Watkins to go with Janssens under cover of a white sheet borrowed from a housewife in a nearby house.

Above: At 2.30 p.m. on September 5, 12 Troop of the 5th Royal Tanks rolled into the southern outskirts of Ghent, halting near the intersection of Galglaan and De Pintelaan. Sergeant Leonard Watkins' Sherman Firefly was immediately besieged by excited civilians. Although this snapshot is of poor quality, the fact that it shows the entry of the very first tanks into Ghent merits its inclusion.



Most of the roads in Belgium and France in 1944 were constructed of granite setts which, although very durable, made travel extremely uncomfortable, especially if travelling in tracked armour. The pavé as it is called also caused tracks to wear. Since the war, the Belgian and French governments have undertaken a massive programme of replacing the pavé with concrete or, like here in Galglaan, tarmac.



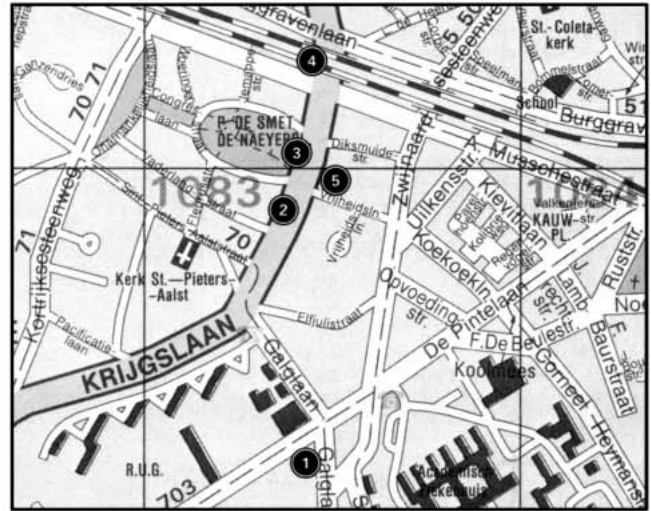
Lieutenant Morgan, the commander of 12 Troop, was not quite sure what to do next. Alexis Janssens, (with his back to the



camera) offered his help to Morgan, who still looks rather worried in this snapshot taken in the Galglaan.



On the edge of the park at de Smet de Nayerplein, Sergeant Watkins met the German Feldwebel detailed to sound out the British. Alexis Janssens (back to camera) acts as interpreter.



The area of Ghent where the British met the German parliamentaries. [1] 12 Troop's first halt; [2] 12 Troop's second halt; [3] meeting with Feldwebel; [4] viaduct; [5] Villa Piette.



By now, the tanks had moved forward into Krijgslaan: Sergeant-Major Seddon's Cromwell in front with Watkins' Firefly behind.



At the viaduct they met the German officer in charge who was unable to give a decision, but he detailed a Feldwebel to go back with the parliamentaries to confirm the presence of British tanks.

By now, more and more civilians were crowding around the tanks and the position was getting more serious by the minute. Morgan then radioed his OC, Major Arthur H. Crickmay, with the call sign 'Victor King' asking for assistance. Crickmay agreed to come up and he arrived about 15 minutes later. In a letter to the author, Major Crickmay recalls that 'Ronnie Morgan came up on the air and said he was in a very difficult

position. I couldn't get anything very concrete out of him (he was obviously worried about security) and so I went forward, rather expecting to find him pinned down with Boche swarming all over his tanks. To my amazement, I found him in a built-up area in the middle of a crowd of some hundreds of euphoric Belgians, with girls, flowers and wine in about equal proportions.'

Major Crickmay then decided to move the tanks forward into the Krijgslaan, with Janssens and the Feldwebel on the leading tank with the white sheet draped over their knees. They stopped some 275 yards from the viaduct. As the Krijgslaan bends slightly

at this point, the tanks were still out of view of the Germans.

Major Crickmay, Janssens, sergeant Watkins and the Feldwebel now walked to the viaduct where an Oberleutnant Schulze was waiting. He suggested that they should proceed to his headquarters and he asked Crickmay to come with him on his motor bike. At the best of times, it would be most undignified for a British major to ride pillion, and in the case of Major Crickmay it would be beyond the pale! Major Crickmay made the excuse that he would not travel without his interpreter Janssens, so Schulze agreed to call up transport.



Watkins, Crickmay, the Feldwebel and Janssens (with white sheet) start out for the viaduct to talk with the Germans.

While they were away, the British in Krijgslaan could do nothing but wait, while the civilians around them celebrated their freedom. In front of Seddon's Cromwell, Father Claeys Bouuaert (facing the camera) relates his adventures to some friends. Bouuaert had been arrested by the Germans in June and been released on August 22 because the judges picked for his trial had fled.

While they were waiting at the viaduct, Crickmay spotted his battalion commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Charles 'Gus' Holliman, with some other officers, so he walked back to explain the situation. Holliman ordered Crickmay to go with Janssens and demand unconditional surrender of the garrison of Ghent, but emphasised that they must be back by 1730 hours as he intended to attack at 1800.

When Crickmay got back to the viaduct, two German lorries and a Kübelwagen were waiting. Crickmay was blindfolded, but for some reason the Germans did not blindfold Janssens.

At the German HQ, they met four German senior officers and a major. When the discussion ground to a halt with the Germans refusing to agree to the unconditional surrender of the city, Crickmay pointed out, through Janssens, that they were completely surrounded by British armour, which of course was pure bluff. The Germans, however, were more concerned that any prisoners might be handed over to the Belgian Resistance (they thought Janssens was a member). The fear of the Resistance, or the Partisans as the Germans called them, was very real as groups had been mobilised since September 2 and were already active in Ghent. They had even occupied the main barracks in the centre of the city. With the Wehrmacht in full retreat, and with resistance men arresting and disarming small enemy groups, the Germans felt unsafe but Janssens assured them that they would be taken prisoner by the British and looked after well. This did however not sway the Germans who pointed out that they had been fighting since Normandy and saw no reason to capitulate now.

At that moment, a Hauptmann Beiacken mentioned that he had fought the Desert Rats in Africa and had always found them to be an honourable enemy. Finally, after another 30 minutes' discussion, the Germans agreed that their commanding general should handle the surrender. Crickmay insisted however that a message was to be sent back to Colonel Holliman, explaining that he could not be back by 1730 hours, as he was now going to another German headquarters. Hauptmann Beiacken was then detailed to take Crickmay's message back to Holliman.



Looking back to the intersection with Galglaan (visible in the far distance) today.

En route to Holliman (in the Krijgslaan), Beiacken's Kübelwagen was halted by some members of the Resistance, about 500 yards short of the viaduct. However, after explaining his mission, two of them (Venneman and

Van De Bulcke) escorted him to the viaduct where they dismounted. Then, with the now-famous white sheet over the shoulder of Beiacken's driver, they walked the last 100 yards to the British outpost.



The Daimler Dingo of Lieutenant-Colonel Gus Holliman, the 5th RTR battalion CO, waiting at de Smet de Nayerplein.



Above: When shortly before 5.30 p.m. the white flag party returned, it was received with great enthusiasm, the crowds thinking the Germans had decided to surrender. **Below:** How-



ever, it was only Hauptmann Beiacken and his driver escorted by two Resistance men, Gendarme Van De Bulcke and Mr Veneman, with a message from Crickmay.



The crowds took the white sheet as a sign of surrender and engulfed the German 'delegation'. At last, the party reached Holliman who had been joined by Major Rodney Goodridge

(OC B Company, 1/6th Queens Royal Regiment) with some of his troops. To calm the situation, the local priest, Father Claeys Bouuaert, arranged for the party to go into a

nearby villa belonging to Jules Piette. It was now about 1730 hours so one assumes that the attack scheduled for 1800 hours (real or imaginary) had been cancelled by Holliman.



The Germans disappear in the crowds on Krijgsaan, where the 1/6th Queens have now arrived to support the tanks.





At the Château d'Houtkine just north of Ghent (left), Crickmay and Janssens negotiated with Generalmajor Walter Bruns (right).

Meanwhile, Brigadier Harvey R. Mackeson (commanding the 22nd Armoured Brigade of the 7th Armoured Division) had heard that negotiations were going on in Ghent, and had driven to the Krijgslaan. He was present when Hauptmann Beiacken arrived with the message from Crickmay, so assuming things were under control, Mackeson left the Krijgslaan at 1900 hours.

By then, Crickmay and Janssens had left the German HQ in the Provincial Palace in a convoy of five vehicles on their way to the village of Wondelgem, about five miles north of Ghent. At the Château d'Houtkine, they were met by a number of staff officers who were unaware of the rapid advance of the 7th Armoured Division and did not know of the fall of Brussels and Antwerp.

After an interval of some 15 minutes, Generalmajor Walter Bruns, the Kampfkommendant (Combat Commander) of Ghent entered the room, booted, spurred, and

bemedalled in full dress uniform. (In Brigadier Mackeson's report, the general's name is mis-spelled as 'Burns'; Janssens, in his original account, gave the name as 'Brunn' — errors which were to confound a mix-up of identities in post-war accounts — see below.) Bruns had been the commander of Oberfeldkommantur 570 (Ghent and surroundings) since June 1942. On June 6, 1944 — as a direct result of the landings in Normandy — he had in addition been appointed Kampfkommendant of Ghent.

On entering, the general was immediately put out by Crickmay's rank, let alone his dress which consisted of a scruffy tank over-all and cravat. Janssens desperately tried to convince Bruns that Crickmay was the official representative of the commanding general of the 7th Armoured Division. However, Bruns demanded a more senior officer, so Janssens suggested he should meet the British general on neutral ground (in the

Krijgslaan). Bruns agreed and left for the viaduct, together with Crickmay, Janssens and three of his staff officers.

From there, the party walked towards the spot where Crickmay had left his tanks. On their way, they were challenged by some sentries of B Company of the 1/6th Queens. Crickmay ordered them to fetch Lieutenant-Colonel Holliman. After a while, Holliman arrived with a couple of officers but, as it was already dusk, their ranks were not clearly visible so Janssens was able to introduce Holliman as the British general. The talks were proceeding when Holliman's interpreter accidentally referred to his CO as 'Oberst' [colonel]. Realising that he had been tricked, Bruns stopped any further negotiations. In the end, Holliman suggested that he could arrange for Bruns to meet the 'genuine' British general later that night, to which Bruns agreed and said he would wait at the Provincial Palace.



Meanwhile, at another château on the other side of Ghent, Kasteel De Buck at Zwijnaarde, British tank and infantry officers awaited the results of the continued talks. Posing with



Mr and Mrs de Gellinck (first and fourth from left) are Major Goodridge, OC of B Company, 1/6th Queens (with map), and Major R. E. Maunsell, 2 i/c 5th Royal Tanks.



In the course of the afternoon, the 1/6th Queens sent patrols into adjacent streets, like this one pictured in Vrijheidslaan.



This Queens' infantryman has installed his Bren gun in a deserted German foxhole across the street from the Villa Piette.

As previously mentioned, Janssens had not been blindfolded. When Bruns heard about this, he told Janssens that after 'the meeting' with the British, he was to accompany the Germans back into their lines. While discussions were going on between Holliman and Bruns, Janssens decided it would be wiser if he slipped away. On his way back home (Janssens lived in the Krijgslaan, some 500 yards behind no-man's-land), he was halted by a sentry of the Queens and taken to the nearby Villa Piette. There 'accommodation' for the British had been organised and in the kitchen were Hauptmann Beiacken and his driver.

After Bruns departed for the Provincial Palace, Holliman drove back to his HQ where he briefed Brigadier Mackeson. Mackeson arrived at the Villa Piette at 2300 hours, where he met Hauptmann Beiacken, his driver and five British officers. In the meantime, the 5 RTR tanks had been withdrawn as Holliman was suspicious and felt the Germans were playing for time in order to carry out further demolitions.

As General Verney, the divisional commander, could not possibly spare any further infantry, it appeared to Mackeson that there would be no harm in trying to get an unconditional surrender by bluff. Janssens was asked to go and fetch Bruns from the Provincial Palace. Together with Beiacken, his driver and a civilian, they walked back to the viaduct to pick up Beiacken's Kübelwagen which had been left in a street behind the underpass. The civilian had been 'trapped' by the curfew and was stranded at the villa. He had begged a lift to his house, situated on the direct route to the Provincial Palace. About an hour later, at 00.45 a.m. (September 6), Janssens arrived back at Villa Piette with Bruns's party.

The meeting between General Bruns and Brigadier Mackeson which followed was, according to Mackeson, 'Gilbertian' in character:

'All the British officers were very dirty and the Germans immaculate. The German general stamped in, halted, gave the Nazi salute and stood in a very arrogant manner. I pointed to a chair as rudely as I could and asked him via an interpreter if he had anything to say. This produced a flow of German which amounted to his saying that his honour was involved and he did not like having so many junior ranks present.

'I roared at him as loudly as I could that I was not going to worry about anything like that. I told him that he must give at once a definite answer as to whether or not he would surrender, and that he had talked

enough already and wasted time. This produced another Nazi salute and clicking of spurs, which were fitted much too low, and a series of 'Neins'. I then pointed out to him: (a) that he was completely surrounded by an armoured division which I commanded (a white lie); (b) that any unnecessary suffering caused to Belgians or Belgian property would be his fault and that I would use the whole of our artillery and RAF as I saw fit to carry out my orders to capture Ghent and destroy his troops, and (c) that a decision to fight on would also reduce the number of Germans in the next generation.

'He replied that he had had his orders and I would realise as a soldier that he could not disobey them. I said that I appreciated that, and that our official interview was concluded but I would speak to him alone as man to man if it would help him personally.

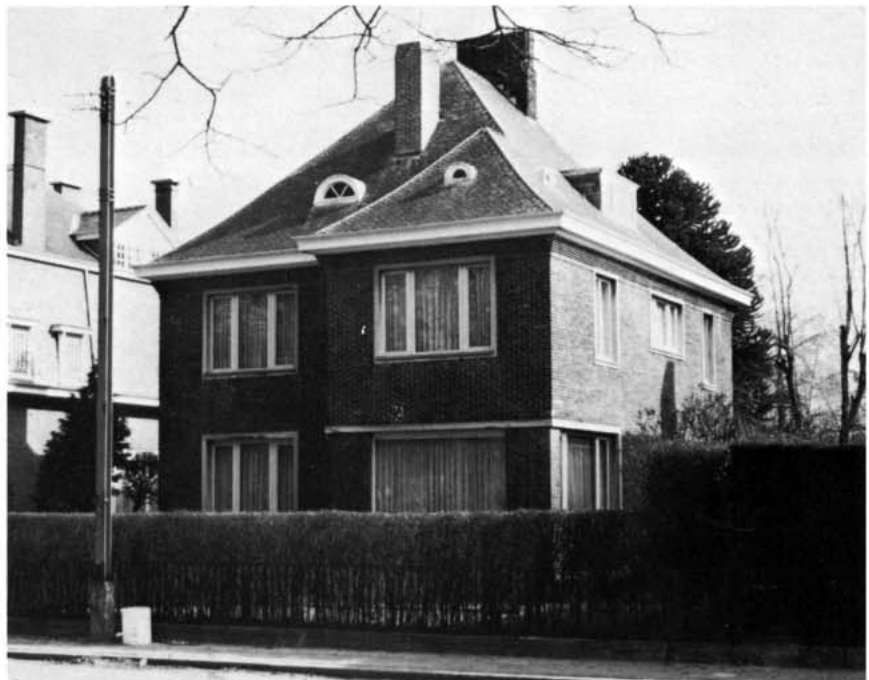
'The room was then cleared and we talked in French for three minutes. He said he really

had referred to his Corps HQ [LXXXIX. Armeekorps] who had taken a long time to get a reply from Army [15. Armee] and that the answer had been a definite 'No', and that he expected to get into trouble for what he had done. I told him that I was very sorry but I admired his behaviour and hoped he would realise how absolutely hopeless his position was tactically and psychologically in view of the number of troops that had surrendered.

'He said he fully realised that his position was very bad. I then told him that Field-Marshal Montgomery had said two days ago that he was no longer interested in the German Army as it was not worth much time or thought but that there were many problems especially political and economic ones in Europe which deserved attention. I told him that this was a first-hand story and that I would not repeat it if it was not true and that the Field-Marshal was not apt to pass ill considered remarks like that and that the Wehrmacht was now obviously only of historic interest.

'This produced an amazing result as General Burns (*sic*) closed his eyes and swayed a little. We then shook hands and left the room. As we passed through the hall, which was full of Belgians I told him that I had stopped our artillery firing and would so until he was back in his own lines — this I fear was another 'Fib', as there were no targets for our seven 25-pounders. He thanked me and said he was sorry he had no communications with the big guns that were shooting into Ghent. [These were later identified as three railway guns: two 28cm 'Kürze Bruno' guns and one 17cm K(E) gun. They continued to shell Ghent until the night of September 13/14.] The British and German parties then returned to their own lines.'

Although he had not formally agreed to a surrender, that night, on arriving back at his own headquarters, Bruns nonetheless did order the withdrawal of his troops from the town centre to behind the canals in the northern part of Ghent — the Ghent-Brugge Canal, the Verbindingsvaart, and the Ghent-Terneuzen Canal — thus saving the old and historic buildings in the centre from destruction.



It was at the Villa Piette, near the corner of Krijgslaan and Vrijheidslaan, that the final scene in the negotiation talks took place when Brigadier Harvey Mackeson of 22nd Armoured Brigade confronted General Bruns in a final attempt to seduce him to surrender the town. Although Bruns did not budge, he did later that evening order his troops to abandon Ghent's city centre, thus saving it from the detritus of war.



The next day, September 6, Morgan's 12 Troop and Goodridge's B Company, 1/6th Queens were ordered to advance to the town



centre. Here, Morgan's Cromwell rumbles through Koningin Elisabethlaan cheered on by excited Ghentians.



By 1.30 p.m., the small force of one carrier, three tanks and four lorries had reached the Botermarkt in the heart of the old city,

where they were hailed by a delirious crowd. Morgan's Cromwell on the left; Corporal Colin Calas' in centre.

With hindsight, it seems pretty certain that the Germans never intended to surrender at Ghent. They must have realised that nothing was gained by trying to hold on to the town centre, and that the canals to the north, forming a natural anti-tank ditch, offered a far better defensive line. It was probably only with this in mind that Bruns accepted to meet Mackeson — not with any intention to surrender, but only in an attempt to gain time.

The fight for the complete liberation of Ghent was to take another eight days. On September 8, the 1/5th Queens, with supporting fire from the 5th Royal Tanks, gained a small bridgehead across the Verbindingsvaart. Next morning, the 1/6th Queens went across the Ghent-Terneuzen Canal, and, later that day, the 2nd Glasgow Highlanders (of 15th Scottish Division) linked the two bridgeheads. Having thus forced the canal line, the three battalions on the 10th cleared the factory area north of it. Next afternoon, September 11, Ghent was handed over to the Polish 1st Armoured Division of Canadian II Corps of Canadian First Army. During September 12-14, the

Poles cleared the remaining northern suburbs of Ghent, pushing north-east in the face

of increasing resistance. At last, all of Ghent was free.



Botermarkt today. The building in the centre is Ghent's town hall.



Two days later, September 8, the 7th Armoured divisional commander, General Gerald Verney, arrives in Ghent with an



escort of two Staghound armoured cars and two Humber scout cars. Here they pass the town belfry on St-Baafsplein. (IWM)

The negotiations for the surrender of Ghent of September 5-6, 1944, had been a remarkable episode, both in the history of the city and that of the Desert Rats. However, shortly after the war, a strange error crept into the accounts of it, and one that has persisted to this day. In September 1945, the Desert Rats published their *A Short History of the 7th Armoured Division, June 1943-July 1945* by Captains Martin Lindsay and M. E. Johnston. In their account of the Ghent episode (pages 83-84), the authors identify the German general not as General Brunns but as General Daser.



Generalleutnant Wilhelm Daser, commander of the 70. Infanterie-Division. (BA)

It is easy to see how the authors came to make their mistake. Generalleutnant Wilhelm Daser was the commander of the 70. Infanterie-Division which since July 1944 had been stationed on Walcheren on the Dutch coast. On September 3, at 4 p.m., Daser received orders to move his division south to Ghent to help stem the Allied advance. For this, his division was removed from under command of the LXXXIX. Armeekorps and placed directly under Generaloberst Gustav von Zangen's 15. Armee. That same night, at 11 p.m., Daser and members of his staff arrived at the headquarters of 15. Armee, which was then still at Wondelgem (the village where Crickmay and Janssens were to first meet Brunns two days later). Conferring with von Zangen, Daser was instructed to form a defensive line on either side of Ghent, tying in with General Brunns's troops already in the town. Brunns, as Kampfkommandant, was to remain responsible for the defence of the town itself. Assembling on September 4, the first units of the 70. Infanterie-Division began arriving in the course of September 5 — the day of the negotiations with the Desert Rats. From September 6, they were engaged in the first skirmishes for the canals line, Grenadier-Regiment 1020 fighting temporarily under Brunns' command after its own regimental commander had been seriously wounded. On the 10th, Daser received instructions to withdraw his division back to Walcheren and the South Beveland isthmus in order to prepare for the defence of the vital Scheldt estuary. During these five days at Ghent, Daser had his divisional headquarters at Evergem, a village just two miles north of Wondelgem. As for General Brunns, having been pushed out of Ghent, his staff was disbanded on September 15 and he himself passed into the general

officer pool. On the 25th, he was given command of the 89. Infanterie-Division.

In view of the above, it is quite understandable that Lindsay and Johnston, when they were compiling the divisional history, made the error of concluding that it must have been Daser with whom the division had negotiated: Daser's division had been the largest formation in the Ghent area (and been identified as such in the 7th Armoured intelligence summaries); and Daser himself had indeed been in the area. Moreover, whereas Brunns was a relatively unknown general (and Mackeson giving him the confusingly English sounding name of 'Burns' had not helped either), Daser's name became well known when he dramatically surrendered his division at Walcheren two months later — after negotiations which were remarkably similar to those at Ghent (see After the Battle No. 36).

Thus, the myth was created that it was Daser who had negotiated with the Desert Rats at Ghent. On the authority of Lindsay and Johnston, everyone came to believe that it had been Daser, accepting it as truth. Even Alexis Janssens, who in his original account had named the German general as 'Brunn', later changed that to 'Daser'! The myth was strengthened when General Verney, the divisional commander of 1944, copied the mistake in his *The Desert Rats*, published in 1954. As a result, for the past 50 years, Desert Rat veterans have spoken of Ghent and related the tale of the surrender negotiation episode fully convinced that the German general involved was Daser. Even our present author, Jean-Paul Marchal, in his earlier publications on the liberation of Ghent, had no reason to doubt that it was Daser. This is the first time that the record is put straight.



Having alighted from his Staghound, Verney and his party prepare for the official reception at the town hall. (IWM)





MYSTERY CRASH IN LONDON'S EAST END

By Winston G. Ramsey

Having worked in the East End of London for 40 years, one of my ambitions has been to produce a book on the area with all its colourful associations: Jack the Ripper, the Siege of Sidney Street; Battle of Cable Street, and so on. I began work on *The East End Then and Now* in August 1995 and, in compiling a list of subjects to include, I listed all those aircraft that have crashed in the general East End area. Only six are recorded: a Gotha in May 1918; a Heinkel in November 1940; a Spitfire in August 1941; a Wellington in February 1942; a Messerschmitt 410 in June 1944, and a Piper Tomahawk in December 1986.

However, there has been a persistent rumour, that another aircraft came down in West Ham in September 1940. Two people who worked for Plaistow Press, our printing works, even claimed to have seen the burning aircraft falling. Les Frost, our composing room overseer in the hot-metal era, stating quite categorically that it fell in Meath Road, not a quarter of a mile from our factory. Les said that he started to run in the direction of the crash but then bombs began to fall and instead he took shelter.

When I began editing *The Battle of Britain Then and Now* in 1979-80, I queried this incident with Peter Cornwell who was compiling the aircraft losses of both sides for us, but he could find nothing in the records to substantiate the claim. Again, when putting together *The Blitz Then and Now* ten years later, I pressed Peter to double-check as in the interim I had received a letter from a reader, Fred Cubberley of Wisbech, Cambs, asking why we had not included this particular German loss which he remembered his mother relating to him as a child (they lived in the next street, Napier Road).

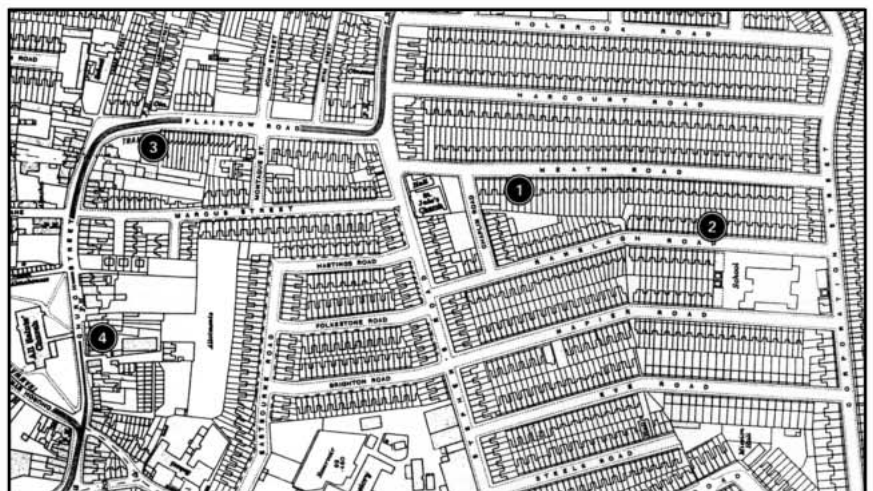
During the war, the site of every German aircraft crash in the United Kingdom was examined by an RAF intelligence team and a report, officially an A.D.I.(K) report, was produced giving as much detail as could be gleaned from the wreckage. However, there

is no 'K' report covering any crash in West Ham; furthermore, the RAF Historical Branch confirm that there is no trace of any aircraft crashing in East London in September 1940.

So, returning to the subject yet again for *The East End Then and Now*, I decided that we must settle the matter once and for all. There is a break in the row of terrace houses in Meath Road and, by checking the Civilian War Dead Roll, we established that this particular incident occurred on September 26 (resulting in the deaths of nine people). However, all our eyewitnesses said the crash occurred on the first day of the London bombing — September 7 — now better

known locally as 'Black Saturday' when the Luftwaffe turned its attention on London.

I therefore began on a new tack by searching the mortuary records for West Ham for that Saturday, the fading foolscap forms (printed by my grandfather for the local council) recording so many tragic deaths in so many families. Suddenly there it was: Agnes Lilian Rapley and Ada Ruth Goldspink killed by 'aircraft through shelter'. Time 18.00 and 18.50 respectively on 7.9.40 at 75 Ranelagh Road (the street backing onto Meath Road).



Top: Saturday, September 7, 1940: East London under the massed attack of the Luftwaffe as Reichsmarschall Göring turns his air force against London. Picture taken at 1850 hours German time (5.50 p.m. in Britain). The section outlined in white is reproduced on the map (above). We have turned the extract sideways for ease of reading the street names. [1] Site of Meath Road incident on September 26; [2] No. 75 Ranelagh Road; [3] Our wartime factory; [4] Our present day works.

Police yes. *Romford Road* Form C.W.D.

DEATH DUE TO WAR OPERATIONS.

Municipal Baths, *E.15*

Name and Address of Mortuary... *ROMFORD ROAD, E.15*

A.—TO BE ENTERED IMMEDIATELY UPON RECEPTION OF THE BODY AT MORTUARY.

Date... *8/9/40* Hour... *12.00* of Reception.

1. Place of Death* *75 Ranelagh Rd. W.H.*
 * Cross out whichever is inapplicable. *against Alan Rapley*
 Full postal particulars of house or street.

2. Date and hour of Finding the Body* *7/9/40 18.00*
 * Cross out whichever is inapplicable.

3. Sex. *Female* 4. Probable Age. *34*

5. Cause of Death [see Note 1]. *Aircraft through shelter*

Signature... *J. Sutton* Official Description... *Baths Supt.*
 Date... *9/9/40*

B.—BODY CLAIMED AND REMOVED FOR BURIAL BY RELATIVES OR FRIENDS.

1. Signature of Relative or Friend... *E.F. Rapley*

2. Address... *75 Ranelagh Rd. West Ham E.15*

3. Deceased identified by Relative or Friend as... *late Husband*

4. Serial Identification Number (if any)... *A.58*
 [See Note 2.]

Police yes. *M.O.H. 44.* Form C.W.D.

DEATH DUE TO WAR OPERATIONS.

Municipal Baths, *E.15*

Name and Address of Mortuary... *ROMFORD ROAD, E.15*

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 * Cross out whichever is inapplicable. *Alan Rapley*
 Full postal particulars of house or street.

2. Date and hour of Finding the Body* *7/9/40 18.50*
 * Cross out whichever is inapplicable.

3. Sex. *Female* 4. Probable Age. *15*

5. Cause of Death [see Note 1]. *Aircraft through shelter*

Signature... *J. Sutton* Official Description... *Baths Supt.*
 Date... *10/9/40*

B.—BODY CLAIMED AND REMOVED FOR BURIAL BY RELATIVES OR FRIENDS.

1. Signature of Relative or Friend... *A. H. Mott*

2. Address... *70 Ranelagh Rd. E.15*

3. Deceased identified by Relative or Friend as... *late Robert Goldsmith*

4. Serial Identification Number (if any)... *A.59*
 [See Note 2.]

We knew of the reputed crash of a German aircraft in 'Meath Road' through local eyewitnesses but when we came to compile *The Battle of Britain Then and Now* in 1989 we could not marry it with a known aircraft loss, partly because no one could then give us a reliable date. Only when I discovered

these mortuary reports in the local studies library in 1995 did the pieces of the jigsaw begin to fit together. Yet there was still no matching evidence in the official RAF or Luftwaffe records, and West Ham's own wartime incident book made no mention of a crashed aircraft in the Meath Road area.

When I went round to Ranelagh Road I found that No. 75 was still standing, and that the current owner, Rex Aquino, had purchased the house some six years previously. After telling him the story, he kindly agreed to show me the back garden where he had recently laboured laying crazy-paving over the whole area. There was no sign of any air raid shelter but a near neighbour who had lived in the house from 1943 recalled a crater filled with old bottles and rubbish at the bottom of the garden. He said his brother had found pieces of aluminium which he said were from the aircraft although none had survived for us to examine. Another older resident said that for many years a propeller blade stood up against the garden fence.

As a further letter to the Ministry of Defence Historical Branch asking them to search specifically for a German crash on September 7 had resulted in another negative reply, I therefore decided there was no alternative to an on-the-spot investigation. Going back to see Mr Aquino, I managed to persuade him to let us dig up his prized paving on the understanding that I would

have everything reinstated afterwards. Meanwhile, I informed the Ministry of our intentions, bearing in mind a licence is normally required under the Protection of Military Remains Act. However, I pointed out that as no specific aircraft identity could be given, and no official reports could be found to substantiate the crash, I believed that no licence would be required in this instance.

On Saturday, August 31 (unfortunately we were prevented from carrying out the dig on the anniversary the following week due to unrelated problems), Ron Turner and John Heals began breaking up the crazy-paving at the bottom of the garden where a detector had given strong readings — right off the scale in one place!

After two hours of digging through a variety of rubbish in which exploded 7.92mm cartridge cases and small aircraft parts confirmed that the wreck was German, the concrete floor of the Anderson shelter in which Miss Goldspink and Mrs Rapley had been killed came to light. The poured concrete was broken on one edge and this was the side where more corroded aircraft parts

were found. There was much evidence of burnt aluminium — remember the aircraft was reported to have come down in flames — and the remains of an MG17 gun mounting bracket confirmed we were looking at the crash site of a Bf 109.

Towards mid-afternoon, we began digging through what was obviously 1940 rubbish: slate tiles and a broken chimney pot from the damaged roof, household items including bottles which had obviously been in the fire, and a large piece of corrugated iron from the Anderson shelter. However, in the midst of it all was the end of a wire hawser; almost irrefutable proof that someone had been there before; almost certainly a wartime recovery crew. Pieces of canopy framework, a piece of the control column and the gauge from the pilot's oxygen regulator confirmed we had reached the depth — now some five feet — of the cockpit although there was no trace of any human remains. Below this were further engine parts firmly embedded in undisturbed soil. Finally, we found the Mercedes Benz badge which once decorated the front of the engine.



Left: I quickly went round to No. 75 Ranelagh (pronounced by the locals, 'Ranla') but from the street there was no outward sign of any damage. The owner, Rex Aquino, found my request to look at his garden (above) rather odd and he must have thought this crazy Englishman, who suddenly descended on him out of the blue, somewhat mad when I later asked him if he would mind if we dug it up!



Left: Saturday, August 31, 1996. Martin O'Brien uses the sophisticated Forster Bomb Locator to pinpoint the best place to start. The most promising reading — right off the scale — was beneath



the table and chairs. Right: Our digging team led by John Heals (left) and Ron Turner begin carefully lifting the paving as it was to be their job to put it all back again afterwards!

So, as we reflected over mugs of tea provided in typical East End style by the neighbours, just whose aircraft were we investigating? There were no further clues to be found in the ground so we began the task of restoring Rex Aquino's garden as we had agreed. Meanwhile, I presented our expert Peter Cornwell with all the evidence. His response was enlightening:

'As promised, I have revisited all the records that I hold in an effort to throw some additional light on your startling and intriguing discovery. Having now completed my trawl, I can find no record of this crash site in any surviving contemporary records consulted, nor any enemy pilot casualty or prisoner unaccounted for on the date in question. So where does this leave us?

'From your excavation, we have the indisputable fact that a Messerschmitt Bf 109E crashed into the back garden of 75 Ranelagh Road, West Ham. Local mortuary records indicate that the date of the incident was 7th September 1940 which is consistent with eyewitness accounts that a crash occurred there during the first big daylight raid on London.

There is a minor ambiguity in the mortuary records in that they show different times, 50 minutes apart, which are presumably the actual times of recovery of the two bodies. But from all this we can safely assume that the actual crash occurred at some time shortly before 1800 hrs on Saturday, September 7th, 1940.

'RAF Intelligence records of the period contain no reference to a crash at this location on this or any other date, but the fact that the site is previously unrecorded comes as no real surprise. It is apparent from surviving ARP records that the authorities were swamped by the unprecedented level of incidents on this day. Confusion, errors and duplications abound in the reports filed making any interpretation, particularly after more than half a century, somewhat problematic.

'One thing is for sure and that is that we should discount the tantalising possibility that we are dealing with a hitherto unrecorded Bf 109 loss. It is extremely unlikely that two separate contemporary Luftwaffe records, each independently compiled, would

both omit reference to the loss of the specific aircraft involved in this incident and its pilot. This would be too great a coincidence. Also, cross-referencing the Genst Gen Qu 6 Abt (1c) returns with the Namentliche Verlustmeldungen offer us no such 'unresolved' candidates.

'Of all known casualties suffered by Bf 109 units in action over England on 7th September, 1940, a total of six aircraft remain unaccounted for and all of these were reported to have crashed in the sea. Four of the pilots were rescued by the Seenotdienst and the bodies of the other two were both later recovered from the sea by the German authorities.

'So it would appear that we are dealing with a known loss which has, in some way, been subject to incorrect recording. Re-appraising all the documentary evidence in light of the physical evidence unearthed during your excavation leads me to conclude that you have located the crash site of what must be the aircraft belonging to Leutnant Günther Genske of 1/JG27: Messerschmitt Bf 109E-4 (W.Nr.5390).



Left: Soon things really got underway, watched by interested neighbours who removed a fence panel for a grandstand view. Right: After getting over the shock of coming home from his night shift to find his back garden in chaos, Rex Aquino, left,



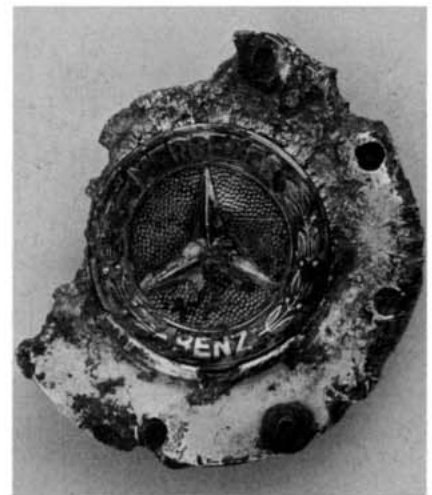
was mildly interested in a piece of aircraft wreckage being shown to him by Gordon Ramsey and Ken Sullivan of *After the Battle*. The corner of the rear of the house shows signs of repair, possibly as a result of the crash.



‘Unfortunately, RAF Intelligence records are pretty sparse in relation to this incident, simply recording him down at “Rainham Road, Hornchurch, Essex, P.M”. The Ver-lustliste records him as ‘missing’ following a sortie over London, although a post-war unit history confirms that he baled out over England and was taken prisoner. Flight Lieutenant G. ff. Powell-Shedden of No. 242 Squadron filed a combat report in which he describes attacking a 109 which “disappeared down out of control in flames over Thames-haven” and which, I believe, also relates to this loss.

‘Unlikely as it seems, a careful reappraisal of contemporary reports now seems to suggest that the Hornchurch ARP Records actually make no mention of Genske’s landing by parachute and subsequent capture. Nor do they report the crash of his aircraft which is not surprising if you accept the theory that it was his Bf 109 which came down in West Ham. The local authorities were obviously operating at full stretch, but did report the crash of a No. 600 Squadron Blenheim at East Close, Rainham, and a Messerschmitt Bf 110D/0 of Stab II/ZG2 down at Park Corner Farm, Hacton Lane, both of which came down within an hour and a half of each other. And it is in relation to reports filed on this latter incident that I now recognise that I have failed to fully unravel the confusion and taken them to include reference to Genske — as indeed I expected they should. A question of seeing only what you expect to see. Yet witness the duplication that I allowed to creep through in *The Blitz Then and Now* (Volume II pages 46 and 62) in respect of the location of Genske’s Bf 109 and Schünemann and Mescheder’s Bf 110. Oh Mea Culpa!

What wretched turn of fate caused Agnes Rapley and Ada Goldspink to leave the safety of their home only to die a few yards away as they sheltered in their Anderson? It was a sad moment when the outer edge of the semi-sunk corrugated iron shelter (left) came to light. A little more digging and we uncovered the actual concrete floor (right) with its broken edge.



Left: The largest piece from the Bf 109 was found just beside the broken edge of the concrete: the front engine gearing and bearing from the Daimler-Benz DB 601 engine. Right: Just below it was the badge which once adorned the Messerschmitt’s power plant as its pilot came under attack from a British Hurricane.

‘My opinion is that Genske abandoned his crippled aircraft which subsequently plunged onto the shelter in West Ham, while he drifted down to land in Rainham Road, Hornchurch where he was captured. The

RAF Intelligence report records the location of his landing and capture, not the crash site of his aircraft. This would allow us to make sense of all the facts as we now know them and clear up your mystery.’



It was Peter Cornwell, who had compiled the losses for us for the Battle of Britain period, who finally solved the mystery. A re-examination of his records led him to deduce that it was the pilotless Bf 109E vacated over East London by Leutnant

Günther Genske of the 1.Staffel (Squadron) of Jagdgeschwader (Fighter Group) 27 which had crashed in West Ham, its pilot floating safely to earth on his parachute some eight miles to the east at Rainham Road in Hornchurch.

ROMAN FORSTNER
GEFR. 31.7.25 † 28.11.45

ANTON DOSTLER
GENERAL
10.5.1891 † 1.12.45

KARL KREMSEK
OJAG. 8.2.21 † 11.12.45

H/93-95